BELSHAZZAR

W. C. DUMAS

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RICHARD G. BADGER
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BELSHAZZAR

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

BELSHAZZAR.....The Last King of Babylon
NIS-BEL.....A Babylonian Prince
SEBA.....A Captive Prince of Judah
DANIEL, A Prophet of the Jews, called Belteshazzar
MISHAEL, AZARIAH, } Wise Men of the Jews and Companions to Daniel
ARIOCH.....Captain of the Palace Guard
BUSALOSSER..A Captain in the King's Army
1ST SEER, 2ND SEER, 3RD SEER } Soothsayers, and Priests of the God, Hea
1ST PRIEST, 2ND PRIEST } ...Priests of the God, Bel-Marduk
MADELINE.....Daughter of Azariah, the Jew
NITROCRIS, Mother of Belshazzar, and Wife of King Nabonidus
OTHERS, Princes, satraps, soldiers, messengers, attendants, slaves, women, dancing girls, etc.

The Action takes place in three nights and three days.

The place—The City of Babylon.

BELSHAZZAR

ACT FIRST

Scene First

(Time—Night First Day. Scene shows the interior of the Temple of Hea, at Babylon. To the left is a massive altar of stone, upon which burn low blue flames. To the back, is the entrance or doorway, flanked by huge columns of stone between which is seen the sky, and a comet flaming over the city of Babylon.

Two Chaldean seers stand beside the altar, with their arms red in the blood of the sacrifice. A third priest stands looking out between the columns towards the city.)

1st Seer:—(*At the Altar*)

"O spirit of heaven hear!
Remember us, remember!
O spirit of the earth come near.
Remember us, remember!"

2nd Seer:—(*At the Entrance*)

What meaneth these nightly signs of terror, these flashing and hissing stars sputtering from the vaulted blue over the Sar's palace?

3rd Seer:—(*Swinging his Censer*)

'Tis not clear yet. The meteor-god oft rides

in his chariot of flame to fire your heavens for the doom of kings, trailing his fiery train far into the night. Thus the gods speak.

2ND SEER:—(*Coming towards the Altar*)
Pale flame, on Hea's altar, thou small counterpart of yon flaming star, another sacrifice thou requirest, a sacrifice of blood.

1ST SEER:—
Yea, a sacrifice ere we know the awful sign of Elam's god.

2ND SEER:—
Must it be a sacrifice of blood?

3RD SEER:—
Yea, and on the altar of Hea.

1ST SEER:—
Or in the city of the King.

3RD SEER:—(*Facing the Entrance*)
Look ye, where flames the flambeau of the gods. They speak thus only in dire necessity or unrelenting anger. Some mortal, stronger than the herd, his brethren, hath defied high heaven's laws and dareth wish for himself those attributes too large for mortal man, bringing on the whole of humanity, the curses of the skies. Some thought anarchical, or some ambition growing in defiance to those heavenly decrees, seeks to usurp the prerogatives of the gods. So out of the primal void,

studded with yon golden drops, the hand which rules in the dominion of night and day, hath in anger launched forth that dread star to warn the daring that heaven tolerates no rival, nor changeth a decree.

1st Seer:—
Must there bleed ram or bullock, sheep or goat, on the altars of the gods?

3rd Seer:—
Man and woman, babe and old man, must drain out their warm red streams of life, below in the city of the King.

Enter Nis-Bel
(*Stands just within the Entrance*)

1st Seer:—(*Bowing*)
Heaven give thee might, and power, and happiness, and bright dreams, O glorious lord of war. Camest thou hither from Belshazzar, the great King?

Nis-Bel:—(*Haughtily*)
Nay, priest of Hea. I came for mine own profit to seek the help of great Hea, determiner of destinies.

2nd Seer:—
What wouldst thou of Hea, Prince Nis-Bel?

Nis-Bel:—
A magic-knot with which to change a destiny.

3RD SEER:—(*Descending from the Altar*)
Wherefore, Prince?

NIS-BEL:—
I love.

2ND SEER:—
Thinkest thou that those two words can change the course of events in their mighty flood and flux?

NIS-BEL:—
Priest, those words have done that, and more.

3RD SEER:—
Is it then to thine own confusion that thou lovest?

NIS-BEL:—
Yea, if ye give me not that charm that binds heart to heart, and makes them bee and flower. There is a maiden among the captives of Jewry, which great Nebuchadnezzar did lead unto Babylon, who has cleft my heart in twain. I am from the palace of the King, and hold power there, but over her I hold naught of power to make her love. Give me a magic-knot and a love-potion.

1ST SEER:—
Holdest thou aught of power in the palace of the great Sar?

NIS-BEL:—

Yea, much power and the ear of the King, priest of Hea.

1st Seer:—
Thy magic-knot then thou shalt have.
Listen:—"Take a woman's linen kerchief, bind it round thy right hand; loose it from thy left hand: knot it with seven knots; do so thrice: sprinkle it with bright wine: bind it round thy hands and feet, like manacles and fetters."

Nis-Bel:—
Is there aught else to make the charm good?

1st Seer:—
Do thou this in the secrecy of thy chamber, and fall asleep bound thus. The day's dawn will bring love to thee.

Nis-Bel:—(*Turning to go*)
The protection of the gods and the great King be thine. To thine own good, thou wilt see more anon of Nis-Bel, Prince of Babylon.
(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

2nd Seer:—
Can there be thoughts of love on earth, when there is anger in the heavens?

3rd Seer:—
Love chooseth not its time, nor circumstance. (*Pointing*) Yet see, yonder still flashes the flaming star over the mounds and battlements of

Babylon. What it portends shortly we shall know.

2ND SEER:—

Yea! Great Hea doth to us unfold all that remains to man untold; give him this chain of gold.

(*As the curtain descends, the seers are occupied with their priestly rights.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT FIRST

SCENE SECOND

(*Time, early morning of the following day. The scene shows a room in the prophet Daniel's house. The curtain rises on Madeline, who is standing alone at the window.*)

MADELINE:—(*At the window*)

The morn's sun seems good. He shines from God's high heaven thus, to renew that glorious promise of freedom, and is one that my people can call Friend. As he mounts upward, and blazes forth in splendor, smiling on me even as much as upon the King, I may call him Friend and Giver of Life with more truth than these Babylonians who prostrate themselves at his altar, and worship him in terror. Already, he hath painted the battlements and highest towers with light, and soon again will carry the morning

message of God to Canaan's people, even in their wretchedness. Now, the very dew-drops on yonder tree leap into life. (*Pausing a moment*) 'Tis time Seba was with me, past time.

Enter Seba

(*Turning joyously*) A wee bit late? Yes?

SEBA:—
Ah, my beloved! A kiss!

(*They embrace. Seba holds her from him and gazes at her troubled face.*) What hath befallen? Are thy father and the prophet well?

(*They seat themselves*)

MADELINE:—
Yes, they are well. Father sleepeth, and dear old Daniel hath not yet returned from his morning visit to his people. 'Tis not that, Seba. Scarcely did I sleep last night. (*Seba starts*) 'Twas nothing, but my foolish fears, fears of the lonesome night. The lights in the skies flickered ghostily across my bed. Now the sun seems so cheerful.

SEBA:—
Foolish fright with which to dim thy pretty eyes.

MADELINE:—
My Seba, are they so dim? Aren't they bright for thee?

SEBA:—(*Tenderly*)

Yea, bright, but in their mysterious depths they hold a secret, perhaps a strange secret. Tell it unto thy Seba. Thou hast been thinking all through the long night when thou didst not sleep. (*Troubled*) Was Prince Nis-Bel in thy thoughts? How I envy him that place in the sanctuary of thy memory!

MADELINE:—

Thou only wast in that sanctuary last night, Seba,—no other. Thou doest me wrong to speak to me of the Prince. I have always tried to avoid him. Thou well knowest that as Belshazzar's ruler over this quarter of Babylon, he oft cometh hither on the King's mission to spy on God's people.

SEBA:—(*Bitterly*)

Jehovah be my witness, but I hate the Babylonian; hear me, Madeline, I hate, hate him! I like not his face. 'Tis carved out of stone, the lines do not shift to and fro, and the mouth is set hard and fast. There is no responsive fire in his eye, ready to leap forth and greet thee as friend. He is much alone, and Madeline, too oft cometh he unto this house. This morn, ere I came hither, I saw him stalking through the King's garden towards the Golden Palace. He stopped, and meditated, started and stopped again, and turned his face towards Hea's temple as the sun rose in purple splendor above it. A lion fawned at his feet. He was less terrible than the face of Nis-Bel.

MADELINE:—
I fear the Prince, too.

SEBA:—
Why then dost thou suffer Nis-Bel to come hither? Why doth the prophet permit the Babylonian to come within his gates? What thinketh thy father, the good Azariah, of Nis-Bel, Prince of Babylon?

MADELINE:—
I cannot choose but see him, and Father Daniel cannot turn him out when he cometh in his insufferable pride, lest his balked desire and defeated purposes kindle the fires of Belshazzar's hatred towards the Jews, and the King's hand is quick to smite. The Prince hath declared his love for me. (*Seba starts*) Nay, start not, my Seba, for I hate him even as thou. Yesterday, he came hither, and with all his hateful pride told me of his passion for me, declaring by his myriad gods a love as deathless as time itself. When I would not listen unto him, down upon his knees he fell, and begged my love. Seba, I inwardly rejoiced to see that prince there before me begging of the Jewess what she would not and could not give. May the God above forgive me for it, but then I wished that thou couldst have stricken him kneeling thus, him who tightens the fetters more about my people, and makes our bondage a hell. Then I laughed at him, kneeling thus before me. Quickly again he was standing facing me and I shudder to think of what was written on

his face. Naught said he, but strode quickly out into the night.

SEBA:—

I must watch over thee all the more closely. Enough! we will speak no more of Nis-Bel. Forgive me, Madeline, forgive me for ever questioning thy love. I will always love thee tenderly, tenderly—yes, fiercely,—I know not which; yes, both.

MADELINE:—

Yet, I fear thy nature cannot trust me even as I would wish it, even as thou wouldst trust me if the world held no other man than thou.

SEBA:—

Doubt me not. Thou art dearer to me than sleep, brighter than the noon-day sun reflected from the bastioned walls of the king's palace. (*Playfully*) Thou art so dear to me that I would lay bare this breast to the flashing sword, and by force take thee, even if thou didst sit a queen beside Belshazzar on his throne of bronze.

MADELINE:—(*Smiling*)

I doubt thee not, but set me here beside thee on this throne of wood. Cedar wood is better for thrones than bronze, when on it sits a man and beside him a woman to love.

SEBA:—

Little black-eyed teaser, thy doubtful smiles of

raillery cut me not. I once truly was a prince, and the time will come, Madeline, when breaking away from these despised walls of Babylon,we will return again to those fair Judean fields where my father's father was King. There I will be King, and if thou so wishest it, thou canst then sit beside me on my throne of cedar wood. What a hope is that to treasure when it gives promise of freedom, peace, plenty, and love under Jehovah's smile, and not under the frown of Babylon's awful god. (*Reminiscently*) Always, it seems to me, have I loved thee, ere I saw the light from my mother's womb, in other worlds than this,—always,—even from the dawn of God's memory, and as the years gather and time grows old, will love thee unto the eve of His forgetting.

MADELINE:—

After the night's gloom, 'tis good to sit thus in the light of His sun. It seems, Seba, that He smiles down upon us.

Enter Daniel
(*Seba rises as Daniel enters*)

DANIEL:—

'Tis well, my children. May the God above always give you such peace. What a pretty picture you made, and now old Father Daniel hath spoiled it.

MADELINE:—

Art thou weary? Come, seat thyself, and let me make thee comfortable.

DANIEL:—(*Seating himself*)
A little weary, child. I have travelled far through Babylon's streets already this morn, but saw none so happy as thou and Seba.

MADELINE:—
My father yet sleepeth?

DANIEL:—
Yea, he went not forth with me. Mishael and I left him sleeping lightly in his bed. He hath not been well of late, and his sleep seemed colored with the outer world. He tossed, and talked between his teeth.

MADELINE:—
Oh, I do fear me!

DANIEL:—
Peace child, fret not thyself for here he cometh.

Enter Azariah
(*Seba leads him to a cushioned seat*)

AZARIAH:—
May the blessings of the day be upon you, my friends. (*To Madeline*) Come, a kiss!

MADELINE:—(*After greeting him*)
Art thou well, father?

AZARIAH:—(*Smiling contentedly*)
Yea, my child. (*To Daniel*) Thou wast early abroad?

DANIEL:—
We went forth early to see some of the brethren. At that time, the streets are clear, and when all else is awaking unto renewed life, this wicked city sleeps after its awful revels.

AZARIAH:—
These revels have increased of late since King Nabonidus went forth against the Persians and left Belshazzar to rule in Babylon. I have evil forebodings, prophet. (*Seba starts, Madeline is frightened*) I can feel what I cannot see, and the shadows of the palace extend their darkness over us.

SEBA:—
Thou hast been unwell of late, and seest not things in their true light as is thy wont.

DANIEL:—
Early, ere sunrise, the King's heralds were crying through the city, "Belshazzar hath forbidden marriage among the young women of Babylon for a twelfth-month."

SEBA:—(*Quickly*)
Among us, too?

DANIEL:—
It is expressly stated so. The herald cried, "Belshazzar, King of Babylon, forbids marriage to the maids of Babylon for the space of a twelfth month. This alike to the captive Hebrew and

the maids of Babylon, under penalty of death. Thus saith Belshazzar through his Captain, Nis-Bel."

SEBA:—
Wherefore thinkest thou he commandeth this?

DANIEL:—
The King hath a sinister purpose.

AZARIAH:—
Belshazzar also hath a sinister agent. The Prince doth oft visit at this house. He loveth my Madeline, but 'tis the calculating love of the serpent, and we dare say naught against him.

SEBA:—
I dare it, and would face twice seven princes for thee, Madeline.

DANIEL:—(*Rising*)
The Lord God, our Jehovah is greater than Babylon and Babylonian princes. Trouble not that heart of thine, good Azariah, but put thy trust in Him, who in the days gone by, did lead His people from Egyptian bondage back unto the land of their fathers. That He will do for us who abide now in Babylon. Come, Seba—!

(*Exeunt Daniel and Seba*)

(*Madeline rises and seats herself on a stool at her father's feet*)

MADELINE:—(*Tenderly*)
Didst thou suffer much last night, father? The prophet said that thou didst toss and moan in thy sleep.

AZARIAH:—
Nay, my child, I suffered not in my body, but my dreams were cast in lurid terror; I and thou, and all this household were driven to and fro through these streets and suffered at the hands of the King.

MADELINE:—
Father, foolish father, to let such a dream trouble thee. Why dost thou not dream of something good and harmless, or of brave men and pretty women, and not of blood? Father, next time dream of me; I will not frighten thee.

AZARIAH:—(*Continuing*)
I wish thou might know no more of man's wickedness than thou knowest now. Thou wast born in Babylon. Thy sire was then young. Thy mother fell and died at the King's nod, ere thou wast old enough to know her as mother. A rich heritage of hate is ours.

MADELINE:—
Dear father, think of tomorrow and not of yesterday, for as young as I am, I know that there is where happiness lies. (*Petulantly*) Thou must not worry, for that is a sign of old age, and thou art not old; thou art young at seventy winters.

AZARIAH:—(*Not heeding her*)
Madeline, thou must never see Nis-Bel, that arch-minion of Belshazzar, again.

MADELINE:—
Father, I ne'er have wished to see the Prince, and I do fear him, but he comes hither to the quarters of the Jews on the King's mission, or hath that as an excuse for coming. To offend him, thou well knowest, would mean death to thee and me.

AZARIAH:—(*Rising wearily*)
Right art thou, my child. Mishael calls to prayer. When this life palls upon us and troubles come nameless and numberless, Jehovah above hath given His promise of emancipation to them who ask and take.

(*Exit Azariah*)

MADELINE:—
Belshazzar hath forbidden marriage to all the women of his empire. What monstrous purpose festers in his brain? Ah Jehovah, the blight of Assyria eats itself even to the hearts of thy wretched people!
(*Rises, goes again to the window, and stands there looking out*)

Enter Servant

SERVANT:—
My lady,—

MADELINE:—(*Turning*)
Why art thou so affrighted? Quick, what hath befallen?

SERVANT:—
The terrible Prince is without and hath asked to see thee. He paused on the threshold, and I ran hither.

MADELINE:—
Since it must be, show him hither.

(*Exit Servant*)

Things happen quickly after flaming stars.

Enter Nis-Bel

(*An Ethiopian guard ranges itself just outside the door. Madeline has turned her face again to the window and is looking out upon the city*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Stopping on the threshold*)
So fresh! so pure, too pure for Babylon! (*Advancing and speaking louder.*) Madeline! Jewess! Behold Nis-Bel, Prince of Babylon who now hath come, not because it pleaseth Belshazzar to send him, but because thou hast drawn him unerringly hither by that invisible power which worketh in him, and maketh him obedient, who e'er now never obeyed god nor man. That power is latent in thy charm and beauty, but is more than beauty or enchantment. (*Checking himself*) Turnest thou then away? Many princesses of Mesopotamia have there been who would have given their dearest possessions to mate with me, who now

offers thee power, wealth, and splendor in Babylon.

(*Pauses*)

Thou art virtually a slave; think what is offered thee.

MADELINE:—

Speak not such words to me.

NIS-BEL:—

If gods gave me words, and power to image the pulsing mind's ebb and flow, I could speak more what I feel.

MADELINE:—

Enough! I will not listen to thee, proud prince. Thy people are not mine; thy gods are not mine. I could never love man or prince who comes among us only to bind the fetters tighter; whose only purpose in doing all which he does is to gain favor in the eyes of his royal master, the King, and who has this day cried through the streets of Babylon a proclamation making us women no better than herded swine to be bought and sold, when he of the Purple Robe says, "I will it so." Thou speakest falsehood when thou sayest "Love," and profanest the most sacred thing between man and woman. Love can never enter that breast reserved for haughtiness and lust.

NIS-BEL:—(*Coldly*)

Cease! Thy anger spoils thy pretty face. If thou wast noble and mighty thou couldst talk

and babble thus, but the weak should ne'er raise his voice in Babylon. My Ethiops await me without. Swarthy are they, and obedient, and this finger wears the signet of the King.

MADELINE:—
Thou insultest the name of Man.

NIS-BEL:—(*Haughtily*)
He who holds power is Man.

MADELINE:—
He who honors woman is Man. Wouldst thou be the first to break the law of thy King, by demanding me in marriage? Wherefore?

(*Enter Azariah and stands unnoticed*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Cruelly*)
I loved thee then. Thou hast spurned my proffered love, putting lightly aside the rich tiara of a Babylonian satrap, and because of thy pride of race, scorn to mate with a son of Mesopotamia. I hate thy tribe; I am strong; mind lest thou lose the name of maid.

MADELINE:—
Devil!

AZARIAH:—(*Advancing*)
What meaneth this, Prince?

NIS-BEL:—(*Brushing him aside*)
Much. (*To Madeline*) Yes, devil! if all the

world were like thee, Nis-Bel would lust for humanity.

AZARIAH:—
Wretch! since that is not so, what?

NIS-BEL:—(*Haughtily*)
I hate the Jew.

(*Re-enter Seba and stands listening on the threshold*)

AZARIAH:—(*Frantically*)
Out, get thee out!

NIS-BEL:—
Not so fast. Must I take orders from a conquered Canaanite? May Marduk blast me first! Old man, Jew, listen. I, Nis-Bel, Prince in Babylon, demand of thee, thy daughter. If thou withholdest thy consent, I will take her by force and place her in the slave mart to be the butt for lascivious jest, and the desire of wanton eyes. Look you, where the Ethiops stand. (*Points to door*)

SEBA:—(*Facing Nis-Bel*)
I am Prince Seba of Judah. Thou hadst best fear me, thou and thy Ethiops. Thy finger weareth the signet of the King, and thy master yonder in the Golden Palace, this morn, issued a proclamation concerning all the women of Babylon. To transgress the King's law is death, whether prince or devil. Thou art a Babylonian, and know Assyria's laws.

NIS-BEL:—(*Raising arm to strike*)
Hebrew dog!

SEBA:—(*Placing arm around Madeline*)
By thy god, Asshur, thou nor thy mighty lord can harm this prince of Judah, and his Madeline!

NIS-BEL:—
Thy words are not dead. They will live as long as memory, and at last, envenomed return to thee. Thou art playing with a blazing brand which will shrivel thee and thine like a green leaf.

SEBA:—
A Babylonian threat, nothing more. Hast thou never watched a bubble floating on the surface of a stream, dancing, and sparkling, and proud in its colored glory? Then it cometh to a whirl-pool, and there is a tossing to and fro, and the bubble is no more,—burst in its tossing glory. Thou art even as the bubble, Prince, and mind lest thou approachest a whirling vortex, lest soon into another world thou goest to swell the hosts of hell.

NIS-BEL:—
Words to be repented of after thine own fashion, and thy religion hath taught thee the easiest ways of repentance. Thou wilt need them.
(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

AZARIAH:—
My son, my son, I thank thee. Look after her, while I rest. (*Exit Azariah*)

SEBA:—(*Seating Madeline beside him*)
Rest; be calm. Let me brush back this raven strand from thy brow. Forget him, Madeline, and live for love in love's moments. Earth is gone when thou art near, for art thou not dearer than aught else earth-born?

MADELINE:—
Seba, I fear for thee that some harm might befall thee. I was so happy this morn, and now that shameless Prince hath plunged me from gleam to gloom.

SEBA:—(*With forced gaiety*)
Words are naught in Babylon, and sooner would I credit with truth these insensate gods of stone silently sitting with their hands upon their knees, than the tongue of a King's captain, who nightly doth weaken himself with wine and revel. Such parasites, who the aspiring fain do call princes, make threats, feel pangs of lust and envy, but ne'er have fangs to strike.

MADELINE:—
But thou wilt care for thyself even as thou wouldst care for me?

SEBA:—(*Rising*)
Yea! Now I must leave thee until the eve.

MADELINE:—
And wilt thou go so soon from me to earth again?

SEBA:—
Come! quickly, another kiss!

(*Exit Seba*)

MADELINE:—
Seba, my Seba, what hatred hast thou drawn upon thyself?

(*CURTAIN*)

ACT SECOND

Scene First

(*Time, late morning. The scene is in the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, on the seventh terrace. Nis-Bel enters followed by a slave leading the lion, held in leash. During the following speech, the slave is occupied with the lion.*)

Nis-Bel:—(*To the Slave*)

Here we stop. Here I await the King.

Thou, and the beast there. In faith, I am as restless as he, and having experienced what I have, am now as fierce, and my nature hath awakened anew to those primal desires, and my mind is fecund with teeming plots to surpass gods and man in deed and daring. Watch thou for King Belshazzar, and tell me ere he cometh.

Slave:—

Yea, I will watch and tell thee.

Nis-Bel:—(*Pacing to and fro*)

Hea's seer lied. My magic-knot was as impotent of good and evil as dreams are. So much for the infallibility of the priests! (*Snaps fingers*) The Jewess' love, fie! Magic-knots, fine words, fancy phrases, plumings and struttings, and such

stuff, cannot, it seems, gain any love of any woman, much less a Jewess': 'tis different when all is clothed and disguised in a lying garb of sweet suggestions, subtle hopes now blasted, now renewed, and never kept. The path to love is roundabout. The animal hath been awakened in me, and his fangs bite, and gnaw, and spur me to act. A devil schooled in the ways of the world, and rich in his stored experience gained therefrom, is a thousand times better, I take it, than a pretty angel flapping around on gaudy wings, and although good, knoweth little of good for lack of contrast with a dusky demon. I hate such! (*Pauses*) Yea, I have it. I, the devil, she, the angel, the King in his palace, boasting majesty and power and having none; the Persian without the walls,—what a combination! They,—nay, we,—all have different passions, good and bad, and I, by combination of these, must play the magician, and take advantage of time and circumstance to heal the wound made by a Jew. Yet, 'tis strange that I should think a moment on her, but 'tis true. She repulsed me, spat, worse than all else despised and spurned me before her own vile Israelitish kinsmen. (*Paces silently*) Seba has, by his own acts, executed his whole tribe already. Prince Seba they call him; Prince only in her eyes. May the gods blast him; may Istar deliver him for revenge to the gods and the King. How? Easily. I answer myself. What are queen mothers good for except to steer ships of state upon shoals and into shallows? The jacket is ready made to my purpose like old Nahum's

second hand clothes, and only needs fitting to time and circumstance.

SLAVE:—(*Calling*)
Master, one cometh striding apace.

NIS-BEL:—
The King?

SLAVE:—
A warrior, and alone.

NIS-BEL:—
A warrior? Quite suitable, but most strange in this time.

Enter Busalosser

'Tis war without the walls to south and west; why then, captain, dost thou strut, and plume thyself here among flowers?

BUSALOSSER:—
I seek the King to know his will. He hath left the palace and walks in his gardens, and hither I have come to find him. True, I should be with Nabonidus before the walls of Borsippa, but I obey the strange commands of a strange King, and remain captain of his reserve forces. This inactivity palls upon me, and I would rather face Cyrus and the Persian, than wander about among flowers seeking a king.

NIS-BEL:—
In sooth, a strange King. He needs must

choose a wife, and cannot fight until another time, while his father goeth forth to fight for the glory of Babylonia. By the gods, fighting is a safer pastime! Yea, captain, hear me, the quest of woman is more fatal to man than war. The King, he is soft and vacillating. Can he be moulded?

BUSALOSSER:—
Like wax. (*Brushes against the lion which snarls*) Is't thy brute? Magnificent! (*Starts away*) Prince, soon again, I'll crave thy company.

NIS-BEL:—
Nay, stay! I also await the King.

BUSALOSSER:—
He lingers in idle dalliance among his women, and needs must have his bath, ere the battle. (*Pointing*) Yonder now he cometh with the dam, who scarce hath weaned him.

(*Enter Belshazzar, Nitrocris, Arioch, Slaves, and Attendants*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Kneeling*)
Great King! The bounds, vast and wide of his empire, and of his rule, may he enlarge, and may he complete.

BUSALOSSER:—(*Kneeling*)
Glorious Prince! Holding over all kings supremacy, and royalty, and empire, may he attain to gray hairs and old age.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Rise, Prince and Captain.

(*To Nitrocris*)
Mother, look you down those pillared vistas, shining in the sun; look you, at the battlements far beyond, enclosing my temples, my palaces, and my city of jasper. Is't not enough glory to be King over this?

NITROCRIS:—
Yea, Belshazzar, but to be jointly King with thy father, Nabonidus, is not to claim thy full share of glory. Thou shalt and must be pre-eminent among kings. Even when a child, I sought to teach thee to feel thyself far above others of thy race. Jealously did I watch thee, in thy development, watch the awakening of feelings of superiority in thee; and when once playing here in this garden, thy nurse crowned thee with a tiara of roses, and chid thee because thou didst wish her laurel wreath too: how my mother's heart did throb with joy to see thee rise in thy childish anger, dash under thy feet the roses, and take the laurel wreath, and wear it as thy diadem! From then, even until this moment I have watched without ceasing thy development, and now thou must rule alone over thy rightful realm.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Mother, King Nabonidus, co-ruler with me, is thy husband, and lord over thee, and me, and Babylon.

NITROCRIS:—
I do not wish to call him husband, though I am bound as such to him. Thou art young and majestic, and will yet see many years of life, ruling among thy people. Nabonidus is old; his days are nearly spent. Soon he faces the Persian hosts on the plains, while thou and I rule within the walls.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Arioch!

ARIOCH:—(*Advancing*)
Thy commands?

BELSHAZZAR:—
Send away the slaves, the women and the soldiers. Set a guard at the terrace steps. Untroubled, and alone, we wish to enjoy the glory of the morning, which Asshur, my lord, hath given us. Stay Nis-Bel, and thou, Busalosser.

(*Exeunt Arioch, slaves, etc.*)

(*To Nitrocris*) Thou wast saying, "Thou and I rule within the walls."

NITROCRIS:—
Hast thou no ambition, nor longings for a peerless throne, no wish to be next in power to high heaven? Art thou blind? Is the way not clear? Wilt thou always abandon thyself to inaction?

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Slowly*)

Nay, the way is not yet clear: but why should I bear the burden of inaction? What would hap if I cast it aside?

NITROCRIS:—

Dare to cast it aside, and see. Dost thou wish to lord it alone over Tigris and Euphrates, and make the whole world kiss thy feet? It can be done. Marduk smiles now on thee, and bids thee grasp the sword to hold the sceptre, peerless, alone, all-powerful, over thy people.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Queen, I catch thy drift. Execution is the same as understanding with Belshazzar, Prince of Babylon. (*Rises and paces*) I will increase Babylonia's power, already great, crush Cyrus and his Persians, become king over all the four zones of the sun, the marcher over the whole world, thy supreme hero. Great Marduk, hear me swear it!

NIS-BEL:—(*To Busalosser*)

A brave resolve. The sun will wink in shame, and hide his face behind a cloud, helpless and impotent, in the presence of such power, and his heaven-wide fields will be a mere satrapy to yield homage to Belshazzar. Forsooth, the mighty powers of the sky have a rival in Belshazzar, whom his mother hath reared to be a wild-dog among kings.

NITROCRIS:—(*To Belshazzar*)
Truly, in that resolve, thou art my son. When, by thy cruelty, thou eclipse dead Asshur-bani-pal of Ninevah, then will I know that truly thou art my son.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Shame on thee, queen, to think that I meant aught of harm to my father when I resolved to shine as a mighty warrior, and a glorious prince. If the fortunes of battle bear him down, an equal with other rotting flesh and marrowless bones, then Belshazzar will not mourn his father, because he fell fighting for the glory of his country, but in thy wishes and ambitious plans, thou wouldst deny me the right to love.

NITROCRIS:—
Kings should feel no ties of kinship to bind, and gall, and make them weak. Ere it be too late, catch opportunity's golden pollen-grains flying around thee.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Whatever my weakness or strength is, let it never be said that I plotted my father's death, or overthrow. Queen, it shall not be. I'll not do that e'en if I do wish it done. My road to power lies roundabout, although the short way over a father's grave beckons to me.

NIS-BEL:—(*To Busalosser*)
Mother and son bartering words for a silver

sceptre. Nis-Bel also hath a temptation for the King, and 'tis so sugared over that he will bite, and swallow, and ne'er suspect.

BUSALOSSER:—(*To Nis-Bel*)
Still, they wrangle.

NITROCRIS:—
Pardon thy mother, Belshazzar. There is promise of nobleness in thy heart which I did not plant there. 'Tis well, yet listen a little further to thy mother, and thou wilt not treat these words lightly, nor fail to act on her advice. Belshazzar, thou art not queened. Concubines, poor, painted, brainless flesh and blood hast thou a plenty, but there is none to call herself queen to Belshazzar, King. Bethink thyself on the continuity of thy line.

BELSHAZZAR:—
I have thought of that, too. Already hath a proclamation gone forth through Babylon's streets forbidding marriage to all maidens until I have chosen a queen.

NITROCRIS:—
Yet thou art too luke-warm in thy purpose.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Angrily*)
Baal's spilt blood! wilt thou nag me to wrath? Tomorrow, I choose a wife.

NIS-BEL:—(*Aside*)
'Tis now my time to crave his ear.

(*Advance Nis-Bel*)
Glorious Prince, grant me a word.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Speak, Prince Nis-Bel.

NIS-BEL:—(*Abruptly*)
Who ruleth in Babylon?

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Angered*)
Jackal! save thy snarls for others than Belshazzar.

NIS-BEL:—
Be not angered, great Sar. Blunt am I, and unused to choose, and juggle my words, and by saying one thing make them mean another. Answer thou my question, I beg thee, O King, and soon I think I may be of service to thee.

BELSHAZZAR:—
I brook thy bluntness, but I wish no game of the fox, no methods of sly deceit, no hidings of motives, no fencings in secret. The glory of Babylon is in the might of her King. That thou well knowest.

NIS-BEL:—
Yea, that I know, but who rules in Babylon, in its palaces and its temples?

BELSHAZZAR:—
Belshazzar and Bel-Marduk, Kings of earth and heaven.

NIS-BEL:—(*Cunningly*)
Belshazzar rules on earth, but some say Jehovah is lord of heaven.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Some say? Who? Let him who says it beware. Prince, be thou plain spoken. Anger me no further by thy riddles, and thy questions of indirection.

NIS-BEL:—
Then to the point, like the arrow to the mark. Beware, the Jew and the Jew's God.

BELSHAZZAR:—
What secret against the throne knowest thou thus to prate about the hapless Jew and his helpless God? What knowest thou, Busalosser, who looketh so darkly and holdeth thine own counsels?

NIS-BEL:—
Naught against thee have I heard plainly spoken, yet O King, if thou art not pitiless towards those wolves and dogs of Canaan, thy proud purple will trail in the dust, leaving thee less than me, Nis-Bel, Prince of thy House.

BUSALOSSER:—
Naught know I against thee or thy throne. Yet, Cyrus of Persia hath encamped himself on the plains over against Borsippa, and it may be that Babylon had best bestir herself from this inaction, and collect her cohorts and her squadrons to oppose him.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*To Nis-Bel*)
Why then dost thou talk to me of Jews, letting the very name slip off thy tongue, as if it had power to affright me? Prince, these Jews are captives. Did not my grandsire, Nebuchadnezzar, the marcher over the whole world, humble them? Kissed they not my father's feet?

(*Enter messengers in hot haste, Arioch and the Ethiopian guard following*)

BELSHAZZAR:—(*To Arioch*)
Is this the way that thou and thy Ethiops keep the gate?

ARIOCH:—
The tidings are of life and death, O King. Hear the messengers escaped from a field reeking with blood.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*To 1st Messenger*)
The King's presence demands serenity.

1ST MESSENGER:—(*Kneeling*)
The demands of the moment will not permit it, great Sar. The Persian hosts have overborne Babylonia's cohorts in battle. The slaughter was fearful, and on that sodden battlefield before Borsippa, arms and armor floated in our blood like drift-wood in the spring time on Tigris' angry waters; their war-chariots, bearing down our men and horses, crushed thousands of bleeding bodies, making of that fair field a sea of blood.

Thy cohorts were in full flight when I sped hither.

(*Retires*)

BELSHAZZAR:—

The King of Persia victorious! He will not find Belshazzar's hosts so easily terrified when he marches towards Babylon's walls.

(*To 2nd Messenger*) And thou?

2ND MESSENGER:—(*Kneeling*)

Dire news, O King.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Quickly*)

Liveth my sire, now? Escaped he from the battle into the walled city?

2ND MESSENGER:—

King Nabonidus, thy sire, hath fled to Borsippa sorely wounded. He was smitten through the breast and scarcely breathes. I slipped around that vast host, far to the north, and came hither.

(*Bows and Retires*)

BELSHAZZAR:—

My father dying! A wish rises up in me, a wish hard to kill; ambition beckons, and bids me rejoice when my heart should be most sad, and the natural bond between son and father is well-nigh eaten in twain by gnawing worms bred from this unnatural circumstance. Oh, I wish I could wish otherwise! How hard must a heart be to become petrified towards a father's love? When

the chance for absolute power was so remote, how strong was I then to protect the King from his wife's unholy intrigue. Now, the terror of the wish! What wish? The gods grant Nabonidus life, though Belshazzar wish it otherwise. And thou to urge me thus, must I still call thee mother? Canst thou feel no pity for him yonder dying, who mated with thee to produce such a creature as I? Canst thou not pity thy son who is torn so within by love for him and lust for glory?

NITROCRIS:—

Pity! Terror! Art thou a man? Look at thy purple robe. Give it to thy slave, and he will wear it as well as thou. Clutch unto thyself the power which the gods have given to thee. Nor grief, nor sorrow, feel I for the wounded King, when by his death thou wilt be exalted.

Enter 3rd Messenger

3RD MESSENGER:—(*Kneeling*)

O King, thy father is dead, and the Persian is without thy gates. From the southern walls, far in the distance, one sees the nodding plumes of his hosts, his burnished armor flashing in the sun, hears his rolling drums and blaring trumpets, and the thunder of his brazen cars. From the east, appear the black battalions, the gorgeous plumes of Elam's horse, risen up against thee.

(*Retires*)

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Rising*)

My father dead! Arioch! proclaim Belshazzar supreme in Babylon, hang the temples in the royal purple, crown his statues with the laurel wreath, and ring forth through his streets the news that Babylon will soon return to her days of glory. (*Arioch bows*) A new sun hath risen. I will scatter the Persian host like chaff before the wind, and drive them howling back into their Aryan wilds. Mother, thou art a great prophet.

NIS-BEL:—

Think on thy thousands lying slaughtered; think on the homes within thy empire which this morn are desolate: think on the spilt blood of thy best warriors, and the purple blood of thy sire: think on these, O King, and prepare thy revenge. The Jew's God hath done this.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Prince, still dost thou speak of the Jew's Jehovah. If thou so wishest it, thou hast full rein. Speak, where doth heaven touch the King?

NIS-BEL:—

High and mighty is Jehovah. The Jew says, "Let Bel-Marduk and Asshur tremble." There is not war among men alone, O King, but the very gods contend in high heaven for supremacy in Mesopotamia, and at night their battle fields of the sky flame and flare with the crimson of war. Thou, too, hast thy part in these battles of the

sky, by lending thy aid to the gods in thy city, Babylon.

There is a Judean Prince among the captive Jews called Seba, if I mistake not his name. He is noble, as I take it, in naught except name, and as report hath it, holdeth secret communication with Cyrus of Persia. This prince,—

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Angrily interrupting*)

Within the hour, flay the skin from the body, and salting his wounds, hang him before the temple of Asshur, my lord. Belshazzar now ruleth over Babylon.

NIS-BEL:—(*Cunningly*)

Yet more, O King; there is more to be heard from the lips of thy servant, Nis-Bel. The death of Seba alone will avail thee naught. Strike at the supremacy of Jehovah, who didst make thy grandsire eat the grass and herbage of the fields. Let the flaying be general; take both man and woman, young and old, that not a seed of that cursed race live to sprout and grow in Babylonia; and let thy anger the harder smite the seers and wise men of Canaan. Bel-Marduk glories and gloats in blood, and Asshur will smile on thee in the gory shambles of that wretched people.

BELSHAZZAR:—

'Tis well, what thou hast said; 'tis well and meet. See thou to it. More of that, anon. What, ho!

Enter 4th Messenger

ARIOCH:—(*Loudly*)
Give way!

MESSENGER:—(*Breathless*)
From the fields of Assyria, triumphant a second Persian host comes towards Babylon's walls. Thrice a thousand war-chariots fill the sky with dust. The glitter of their bronze hath blinded my eyes. They march, apace, great King, against thee.

(*Retires*)

BELSHAZZAR:—
Come all the lords of all the earth. Belshazzar will welcome them. Busalosser!

NITROCRIS:—(*Quickly to Busalosser*)
Stay! (*To King*) Ere thou, who art now king supreme and wifeless, march forth against the Persian, bethink thyself of the continuity of thy line. See if Jewry or Babylonia hold a mate for thee.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Impatiently to Queen*)
That will be on the morrow. (*To Busalosser*) Busalosser, assemble the flower of Babylon in thy ranks, organize new cohorts, draw thy soldiers from the youth of the city, drain her very blood if need there be, for the glory of Belshazzar. With thy army, and the best of thy captains, face the Persian army on the plains. Soon I will join thee. Go! and lose not a moment under penalty of death.

(*Exit Busalosser*)

Thou, Nis-Bel, with my soldiers of the palace prepare a torture of death for the Jews. Naught shall now oppose me. Now art thou answered when thou askest, "King, who rules in Babylon?"

NIS-BEL:—
Not a Jew will breathe within the circle of thy walls at the setting of the morrow's sun.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Rising to go*)
Come, mother! Thou art now greatest in the land. (*Exeunt all but Nis-Bel*)

NIS-BEL:—
The ready made garment of circumstance fits the King to my purpose. Power in Babylon! Babylonia's power perished with Nabonidus before the gates of Borsippa. An acorn shell could hold a well of water sooner than Belshazzar an hour of power. He is a child, a woman, follows my lead like the hound the stag, and all the while thinks he is commanding. And the Jew; he makes me laugh. Prince Seba will flay well; his hide is so loose. Madeline, thou must lie once with a prince of Babylonia, ere thou die. (*To Lion*) Come! (*Exit*)

(*CURTAIN*)

ACT SECOND

SCENE SECOND

(*Time, morning of second day. The scene shows a street in Babylon. Present Arioch and Seba*)

ARIOCH:—

Good morrow, prince. Thou truly art the only one inside the walls whom I do fain call Prince or Friend.

SEBA:—

And thou art the only friend I have away from my people. 'Tis strange that I should so love thee who was born in Mesopotamia, yet Arioch, I hold thee right noble, and far above thy people, and thy King.

ARIOCH:—

I am not of Mesopotamia. The buffetings of chance brought me hither from the plains of Arabia. Chance, Prince, is the creature of Destiny, leading one round-about, only at last to guide him where he more quickly would have gone had he been free. So, one day Belshazzar saw me, and took a strange fancy to me. He made me captain of his palace guard; he placed me in command of his household; and he, in his restful moments, unfolded to me the innermost secrets of his breast, chiding me that I did not applaud, and threatening me when I dared oppose some dear plan which he wished to carry out. I never trembled, but always in the splendor of his court, there seemed to be something held above me, some suspended doom at any moment ready to drop. What is written will be, so I feared not the King. Of late, a change hath come over him, a fearful change.

SEBA:—

What, my friend? Never before was thy face so dark.

ARIOCH:—

The blood-thirst of a long line of Assyrian and Babylonian kings hath awakened in his breast. A lust for glory, and a self-conscious power make a monster of Belshazzar. Nis-Bel hath the King's ear; Queen Nitrocris prostitutes her heaven-born attribute of mother to the unlawful exaltation of her son. He is supreme now since the great battle on the plain, and I have heard from the King's lips words to make any man hate Babylon.

SEBA:—

Where ever lived a man who loved Belshazzar?

ARIOCH:—

This morn, unto the seventh green terrace of his garden, he came with the queen mother to breathe the morning air. Here the Prince Nis-Bel gained his ear, and straightway he sent all away, me with the rest. While I strode through that garden splendid with poppies and sweet with nard, thinking of my fair land of Arabia, there came in haste four messengers, all covered with blood, and demanded the ear of the King. They brought tidings of defeat to King Nabonidus. Belshazzar's father was slain. Then the King arose in anger, blood suffused his face, and he proclaimed himself supreme. Straightway he

charged Nis-Bel to smite, and spare not thy people, the Jews. I know not why they have thus angered him, but Nis-Bel had had the ear of the King.

SEBA:—
Great God of Israel! the reason is plain, too plain to me. Gave he power into the hands of the Prince?

ARIOCH:—
Yea, all power within the city hath been given unto the Prince. His face was lighted with the fires of satisfaction, and his eyes danced and gloated.

SEBA:—(*Slowly*)
Friend, I understand. His jealousy and hate have fired thy mounds and shrines, O Babylon, and thy temples, thy shrines, and thy hills of stone are senseless earth and helpless, mere baubles in the eyes of Jehovah. Arioch, I fear not for my people. Listen, friend! There is one among them for whose safety I do fear. She is betrothed to me, and Nis-Bel's eyes have fastened themselves upon her, and Nis-Bel's hate, grown out of a thwarted love, has doomed her; and in that doom of his he includes Seba, Prince of Judah. Arioch, wilt thou aid me against the Prince?

(*Going*)

ARIOCH:—
Seba, to my uttermost.

SEBA:—
Thank thee, captain, and friend.

(*Exit Seba*)

ARIOCH:—(*Sadly, moving off*)
A beautiful faith is his in Jehovah, his God; but never will he return with his people to Jerusalem's empty streets: never will he see his flocks and herds grazing on Canaan's green hills: never will he love his Madeline there amid roses and voices of song. Would to his great God that his faith could prove the conquerer! The King hath nodded and in his demon's work, Nis-Bel will never swerve, but make the torture a devil's hell. After tomorrow, I, far away from fair Arabia, will be alone in Babylon, while he, bleeding, goes to leave my solitude a solitude indeed.

(*Enter Nis-Bel*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Haughtily*)
Stay, Captain! Why dost thou linger in the streets, and wander aimlessly about wearing that funereal face fit to make the devil weep, when even now the King calls loudly for thee? Thy Ethiops murmur.

ARIOCH:—(*Turning*)
Let Belshazzar call, and call in vain. Kings, even as we of humbler blood, have wishes far from their grasp, and perchance some day he will need me and my Ethiops more than now. Love hath demands on a true man's time before kings.

NIS-BEL:—

Is't possible? Love? Once, I, towards whom thou showest such contempt, thought even as thou. Love? 'Tis not strange. It is the same with bird and beast as with man and woman. Such was mine, and I have slight faith in it, and less in that of others. Believest thou that one can love except when he seeth the one whom he loveth? Believest thou that the peacock would not love the pheasant, if the pea-hen flew away?

ARIOCH:—

Such natures as thine are as false as lies themselves.

NIS-BEL:—

Nay, true as truth itself. The sword, captain, makes nations crimson, and we wail out our condemnation to the skies, but how many men's souls are lost through a woman's eyes, how many lives are held by a tress of hair? Arabian, they are unknown and unnumbered.

ARIOCH:—

Love,—a true love,—hath arguments stronger than words for the rights of man and woman.

NIS-BEL:—

Old Dark-face, thy arguments are sadly awry. 'Tis well as long as all is flowers, but when the rose is withered there is found the thorn. Listen, thou, to my philosophy. On love's many tongues, thou canst not distinguish a vaunt from a vow;

her vermillion dawns promise dark and wretched eves; her faithful vow hath a triple meaning; her honey is most bitter when thought to be most sweet.

ARIOCH:—
How knowest thou? Whence thy philosophy?

NIS-BEL:—
From life, wherefrom I draw my bitterness.

ARIOCH:—
Why tellest thou me these things?
When I look on thee, tempted am
I to mock the folly of man's pride.

NIS-BEL:—(*Cynically*)
Mock, well mock. This world is made for mocking when I mock the King, and thou me. Listen to my mockery, listen! The King hath had a dream. The weak never sleepeth well, but like the child dreams. When such weaklings dream, mark you, always do they think it betokens something of moment to them. Folly 'tis to think the gods care enough for any man alive to warn him of dangers unseen, while he sleepeth. Yea, the King hath had a dream, and calls loudly for his seers. He wishes an interpretation. That's funny for a strong man. 'Twould be fit for an Ethiop to ask, but in a King, 'tis folly. How funny man is! He must make perpetual merriment for the gods.

ARIOCH:—
'Tis dreams, always dreams, that worry us. Babylon is more human in her sleep.

NIS-BEL:—(*Going*)
Thou of the dismal face, confound humanity with the things of the sky. They are separate; priests always lie; so even now, I go to see them on a mission for the King. Farewell, Dolor!

(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

ARIOCH:—(*Looking after him*)
Self-centred! who is more happy, he or I? By the sword, by the torture, by taking from him sweet liberty, doth man punish man. The gods decree otherwise, and give a too long life as their punishment; life with the twin brethren, Loneliness and Memory. Ah! one could covet sweet death, and perchance have to live, but as ever I must answer to the King. (*Going*)

(*CURTAIN*)

ACT SECOND

SCENE THIRD

(*Early night of the third day. Interior of temple of Hea. Fires are burning on the altar, and at first the stage is vacant*)

Enter Nis-Bel

NIS-BEL:—(*Looking around*)
They call this sanctuary. Well, I broke into

the sanctuary to seed the priests against the King. It must be done with infinite tact, for priests love to deceive themselves, and exalt themselves in their heaven-given duties. (*With a sweep of the hand*) Here's where I obtained my magic knot, with which to gain the love of the Jewess. 'Twas impotent, unsanctified in these hands. The priests lied to me then, and they perforce must lie to the King, for me now. Sanctuary! I broke through the scarlet hangings at the door, and yet live to mock yon wee, blue, sputtering flame, on the altar of the mystic god. I call men mere children to kneel in these mighty temples of the gods, where only the vaulted roof hears the supplicant's prayers, and the priests are as powerless to change good or evil, as the howling wild-dogs on the plains. But Nis-Bel can give thanks. (*Mockingly kneels before the altar*) Thanks be unto that man,—no god,—who in the days of club and spear questioned the correctness of anything, unto that unknown mind, that set the ball of Doubt bouncing down the stairs of Time. (*Rising*) All the gods must be dead,—at least Babylon's. Nis-Bel says they ne'er lived except as a fabrication. The King hath dreamed a dream, and his heart hath softened towards the Jew overnight. (*With a shrug*) Such men are made of this and that.

Enter 3 Seers

Homage to you, ye who carry wisdom upon your brows.

1ST SEER:—(*Advancing*)

The dusts of hell be upon thee for thy defilement of the sacredness of the sanctuary! May Serah torture thy flesh with the pains of hell, and load thy feet with chains, and thy life with curses!

NIS-BEL:—(*Coldly*)

Such fuss! Save thy wind lest thou blow out the sacred fires. The King hath dreamed a dream.

2ND SEER:—

Priests of Hea care not for the King's dreams, and they concern us not.

NIS-BEL:—

Again folly. Doth death concern thee? Art ready for the feast of the silver fountain and dost thou wish to enter heaven by the by-path of my sword? If thou art not ready to desert forever this, thy temple, thou hadst best come quickly to the palace, when Belshazzar commands thee. I am sent hither for all ye of this sanctuary. The King believeth his fate bound hard and fast within the fabric of a dream, and chides at delay, and loudly calls for an interpretation.

3RD SEER:—

What hath the King dreamt?

NIS-BEL:—

I do not think for him, neither does he unburden his troubles on me, but wails them out to

the sky because a nightly fabrication, born of a wine-soaked brain, troubles him.

1ST SEER:—
Since it is thus commanded, we will go thither beneath that roof of crime. Carry thou this word to the great Sar.

NIS-BEL:—(*Raising his hand*)
Stay! Hear me, ye three. Ye have heard of the battle of Borsippa; ye have learned ere now, that King Nabonidus was slain; ye know that now Belshazzar is King supreme, and that Cyrus, the Persian, encampeth against our walls. Ye know,—

THREE SEERS:—(*Interrupting*)
Nay! woe, woe! to Babylon and to us!

NIS-BEL:—
Save your woes to temper your sorceries and wicheries. Yet may they prove convenient and effective. The point is that the great King is angered and troubled by a dream. I know not what it is, but whatever color it takes in the telling, do ye interpret it to mean woe to Babylon, unless the Jew is destroyed, seed and branch.

1ST SEER:—
Presumest thou to tell Hea's seers how to interpret dreams?

2ND SEER:—
Thou knowest the traffic of the kingly courts, we the voices of the gods.

3RD SEER:—
Accursed Prince! Heaven blast him!

(*They turn to go*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Quickly*)
Stay! Have ye heard of a god in heaven named Jehovah? Ye saw Him yesternight riding over the sky's burning marls. Do ye, then, also love the Jew's God? Mind lest He over-rule your gods. Belshazzar's mind is troubled, so use ye the King as an instrument to remove Jehovah back to Canaan. Then will Asshur rule supreme over Babylonia.

ALL SEERS:—
Glory to Asshur, and the heavenly hosts!

NIS-BEL:—
And to him of the argent sceptre! Then black must be the color of your interpretation. (*Touching each one in turn*) Wilt thou interpret his dream to mean death to someone; and thou hint darkly of death to him, the King; and thou offer to him as the only alternative of life and glory, the slaying of the Jew? Then the monarch will rejoice, and load you with gold and silver and precious stones.

2ND SEER:—
Great Prince, we will do thy bidding.

3RD SEER:—
Yea, and obey thee for thy gold.

1st Seer:—
And for the fair promise of heavenly revenge.

Nis-Bel:—
Haste ye then to the palace, where the King raves ready to believe any story, and any explanation is better than none to such a troubled mind.
(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

All Seers:—
"Then sing your songs of hate, ye fiends,
And hurl your pestilential breath,
'Till every soul before us bend,
And worship here the god of Death."

1st Seer:—
Wealth, honor, protection, and power. Come!

(*CURTAIN*)

ACT THIRD

Scene First

(*Morn of fourth day. Scene shows the great hall in the palace. Present, King ,Nitrocris, satraps, soldiers, dancing girls. Seba stands above, behind a column near Arioch.*)

Dancing Girls:—(*Singing*)

"No rival hath our mighty Sar,
Thy cymbals strike and raise the cry.
All hail! all hail! great Belshazzar!
His deeds immortal glorify."

Nitrocris:—(*To Belshazzar*)

When wilt thou choose thy maid? See how ugly now thy women have grown, and they were never other than those, who would as quickly sell thy slave as thou, their bodies and their passions.

Belshazzar:—

No more of that. I am plagued with other things. Anon, I will choose a wife to satisfy thee, mother. Thou art unreasonable, and well-nigh wearest out my patience with thy nagging. My

heart hath softened over night towards the Jew. I tossed last night and a dream did plague my sleep. Hath the Prince yet returned?

ATTENDANT:—
Not yet hath he returned, my lord.

NITROCRIS:—
Yesterday, thou wast brave, now thou sittest there trembling like a woman before her angry lord.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*To Arioch*)
Cameth no news from Busalosser in the night?

ARIOCH:—
Naught have we heard, nor any sound of battle. From the walls, I saw thy hosts resting on the plain, under clouds of dust.

(*Enter Nis-Bel*)

NIS-BEL:—
Thy wise men follow hard upon my heels.

DANCING GIRLS:—
"Thy city they will bless, O Sar!
With joy, with joy!
And prosper thee in peace and war
With joy, with joy!"

BELSHAZZAR:—
Take the women away. They dance prettily, but their voices wail.

NIS-BEL:—
He truly must be sick.

Enter Seers

1ST SEER:—(*Advancing*)
Length of days, long lasting years, a strong sword, a long life, extended years of glory, pre-eminence among kings, grant ye to the King, my lord, who hath given such gifts unto his gods.

2ND SEER:—(*Kneeling*)
And after the life of these days, in the feast of the silver fountain, the heavenly courts, the abodes of blessedness; and in the light of the Happy Fields, mayest thou dwell a life eternal, holy, in the presence of the gods, who inhabit Babylonia.

3RD SEER:—
All glory to thee, O King! Command us!

BELSHAZZAR:—
Rise up, ye men of wisdom. (*Pointing*) Stand there. Lend unto me your prophetic voices, and look ye far adown the dim vistas of the future, to see what meaneth this dream which last night did plague my sleep.

"I saw two men, last night, beside a god; one a turban wore, and fearless trod; the god reached forth his hand, and struck one down. Like mountains hurled on fields of corn thus prone he lay." The raiment which clothed the body of the hapless one was scarlet, his hands were scarlet,

and as the god looked down upon him, prone at his feet, great flocks of caws and kites came up from the four winds of the heavens, and hovered ready to light and begin that awful feast, as soon as the god should raise his hand. The second warrior of the twain kept his place on the right hand of the god, and in his hand was a sword, and on his brow, a laurel wreath.

This dream, all the night, came and went, now vivid, now dim, until the first signs of the dawn. Then it vanished. Interpret this dream I charge you, ye seers of Hea.

1st Seer:—

That god was Adar, the terrible lord of the spirits of heaven and the spirits of earth, and the man lying prone there on the plain, clothed in scarlet, was thee, O King.

2nd Seer:—

The hovering caws and kites were the hosts of Persia, threatening thy destruction. The warrior beside the god, wearing the laurel wreath, was Cyrus, their King.

3rd Seer:—

To fight such power of the gods, to oppose Adar, is vain for thee, King Belshazzar, Lord of Babylon.

Belshazzar:—(*Angrily*)

Ye lie, devils; spirits of darkness and demons of the seven nights, ye lie!

1ST SEER:—
Great King, there is yet more.

2ND SEER:—
Yea! Thou hast angered the powers above, King of Babylon, and Asshur, my lord, must have a sacrifice. Make peace with him, for to fight such power is vain.

3RD SEER:—
"And if thine anger rules thy heart
As fire, as fire!
And thou, against thy foes, would start
With ire, with ire!
Against thy foes, thy heart be hard,
And all thy land with fire be scarred,
Destroy thy foes.
Destroy them in thine ire!"

BELSHAZZAR:—
Mean ye to destroy the Persian who has marched against my city?

1ST SEER:—
Destroy first the Jew within thy walls. He is the sacrifice demanded by high heaven. Then thou canst easily drive Cyrus before thee back into Media.

2ND SEER:—
There is naught else, King. May the gods preserve thee.

(*They make obeisance and retire*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Aside*)

They think no more than a full crow on a summer's day, yet 'twas neatly done.

BELSHAZZAR:—

I did not wish it so, but everything points to the necessity for the death of the Jews. I know not why for they are the least turbulent of my people.

NITROCRIS:—

And their maids are more beautiful than ours. They do seem to me to be very seemly in their love of peace.

NIS-BEL:—(*Artfully*)

The gods know best. Hast never seen along the shores of Euphrates, the royal stream, a pool, lying enclosed on all sides by its green banks covered with roses? There are many such. They, on the mirror of their surfaces, are calm and peaceful, but at the bottom of their cool waters, there are mires of sand treacherous and quick to draw into their black depths the artless stag, that comes to cool his panting sides in their refreshing waters. Such is the Jew. Visibly, he is as harmless as Euphrates' pool, but in the bottom of his nature, slumbering deep below the surface, are the treacherous sands of passion, faith, and tradition, which can draw thee, O Belshazzar, to thy doom. They are an artful race, cunning, and by guile at last, may overthrow thee by leaguing themselves with Cyrus of Persia.

BELSHAZZAR:—
They shall die; perish by the torch, the axe, the spear. Haste, Arioch! thy Ethiops!

NIS-BEL:—
Nay, King, call not him. His breast is soft, and he pities the wretched. He can only muddy the pool without draining its treacherous waters. Thou dost not need such a lieutenant for this work; but I have already prepared the death of the Canaanite as thou didst order yesterday.

SEBA:—(*To Arioch*)
Must I look upon such a monster and not strike? I will clutch his throat, and grind under heel his saffron robe.

ARIOCH:—(*Uneasily*)
Be calm, my friend, lest thou draw on thee and me a worse fate.

BELSHAZZAR:—
The funereal clouds of my gloom have blown away, and again the sun shines. The gods shall have their sacrifice, they who love blood and death, while we feast and drink.

NITROCRIS:—
Such is the necessity, but I who pitied not my husband, pity them because they are so helpless: but no more of that. Belshazzar, 'tis time for thee to have led before thee the beauty of the world, for a choice of thy queen.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Thou, like all women of every clime, thinkest little of war and terror, but much of love and peace. In a woman that is meet; but every man has to be pitiless, climb over the prostrate bodies of the weak, to reach the zenith of his destiny. (*To guard*) Lead the women in.

(*Enter long line of women, both Babylonian and Jewish, together with women of other countries. They pass slowly before the throne. Madeline is among them. Belshazzar and Nitrocris closely scrutinize each one as she passes.*)

BELSHAZZAR:—
How beautiful! She from Arabia? No, too low she hangs her head.

NITROCRIS:—
And minces in her steps.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Yea! Yet another? Look you, mother, at the pride written on her face. How she strides! I'll wager she was born and bred in Babylon.

NITROCRIS:—
Too masculine! Methinks she forgot her sword and shield.

BELSHAZZAR:—
This, a daughter of the Syrian sun. How her breast heaves, and her face is sensitive! I like her looks.

NITROCRIS:—
Yet, she is slightly under-size, and hath not that regal front to match thy majesty.

ARIOCH:—(*To Seba*)
The eye is not the only judge of womankind.

SEBA:—(*To Arioch*)
To such as he, it is the only judge.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Here cometh a languid Elamite. How red are her lips; her body is as slender as the reed; and she seems scarcely to move, so smoothly does she glide.

NITROCRIS:—
Unfit to wear the purple robe. She hath not pride enough.

(*Madeline passes before the King*)

BELSHAZZAR:—
By the heavens and earth! A woman of Judah! A Jew! She trembles but as lightly as the reed! How nobly and proudly she carries her head! What jet black hair; what a neck, graceful as the antelope's, without an ornament, without a jewel, and needing none! Born in a princely house of Judah, yes, without a doubt. (*To Madeline*) Stop there, before the brazen throne. Art thou of Jewry? So fresh! O beauty, breathe thy sweet charms on Belshazzar! (*To Nitrocris*) How mother?

NITROCRIS:—
'Tis well, Belshazzar, thy choice.

BELSHAZZAR:—
The grim visage of the war-god would crack and wrinkle, wreathed in smiles, in thy presence, jewel of Judah. Thy name?

MADELINE:—(*Faintly*)
Madeline, daughter of Azariah, prophet of Israel.

BELSHAZZAR:—
A princess, indeed, but I shall call thee child of the soft voice. No man alive could resist the charm of that well-rounded forehead, that white heaving bosom, those lips so ruby ruddy, and that low voice so tunefully sweet, bearing a hint of things sweetly mysterious. No king would wish to close his eyes on that raven hair, or shrink from looking into those eyes, radiant, deep, and unfathomable.

SEBA:—(*Fiercely muttering*)
Purple tyrant of hell! Seba will face thee.

ARIOCH:—(*Placing a restraining hand on his shoulder*)
Stay! yet mayest thou be her savior.
To face him would be folly.

SEBA:—
God grant it! Must I look? I cannot, now turn my head away.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*To Madeline*)
Seat thyself here on the throne of bronze, there, not so high, on the step. Now, look at Belshazzar, thy lord. Chain me with thy arms, and hold a king as thy slave.

SEBA:—
Will heaven permit it? Hell cracks its bounds and the devils escape.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Touching her*)
Thou must change this linen for robes of royal hue. Likest thou fabrics of gossamer, and envelopes of woven gauze in which to wrap the matchless symmetry of thy body? All lands, far and near, will yield up to thee their silky webs and tissues of many hues. I will load thy arms and neck with festoons of gems. Thy crown will dazzle, and thy crest-jewel will be a diamond leaping into life, in the halo of thine own matchless head. (*Touching her hand*) How soft is thy skin, as soft as a parrot's breast!

NIS-BEL:—(*Under his breath*)
The royal fool carries his praise beyond the bounds of reason. Why not sing a song, since King hath turned poet? See what my magic-knot hath done. 'Twould seem that I bought it for the King.

Enter Messenger

MESSENGER:—
Thy army is in full flight towards thy gates.

Ten thousand lie slain on yonder reeking plain, and I saw vultures, treading corpses, revelling in that victory of death, too full, too gorged, to hover. Only the walls have stopped the march of the victorious Cyrus.

(*Stands aside*)

Enter Busalosser wounded

BELSHAZZAR:—
And thou returned in thine own strength, and not borne along by others on the stretcher of death? Wherefore, captain?

BUSALOSSER:—(*Faintly*)
Their hosts could not be stayed, but like an avalanche on the slopes of the Armenian mounts, did their forces hurl themselves in waves upon us. I was forced to flee within the walls. I am faint. (*Falls*)

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Angrily*)
Away with him! (*They bear him out*) (*To Madeline*) Sweet queen, thou art unused to such sights of horror; never again will thy eyes be offended by the crimson badge of strife. Never! I, the King, will see to it. (*Rises*) Come, I will place over thy raven locks a circlet of gold.

Nis-Bel, call the captains together in council of war; say that the King will be there, and woe unto him who dare say that the lords of Mesopotamia cannot stand against Media's hosts.

(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

This night we feast; tomorrow we fight to show the Jew, Jehovah, and the Persian, who lords it over Tigris and Euphrates. (*Exeunt King and Madeline*)

(*Running to and fro*)

(*CURTAIN*)

Act Third

Scene Second

(*Morning of fourth day. The prophet Daniel's house. Present Daniel and Azariah*)

Azariah:—

Woe is the old man! The house now is still. Vanished, gone, is the soul of the house. I shake, I tremble. Belshazzar hath taken the old man's strength with his daughter. Look down, Jehovah, on thy wretched people. (*Sobs*)

Daniel:—(*Comforting him*)

God is not mocked. Be thou of good cheer, for He who can carry His children unharmed and unburned, through the white heat of the blazing furnaces, can protect his own, who hath fallen into the hands of the King.

Azariah:—

The King, Nis-Bel, Babylon, Hell burn them all in its hottest flames. Torture them through thrice seven eternities, for laying their vile hands

of rape upon a daughter of purity. (*Becoming calmer*) Prophet, they took her at sun-rise, while thou and I visisted the brethren. They took her, and carried her off to the palace; they took her, yes they told me so, as she arose from her knees after giving thanks unto her God. Wherefore, prophet, thinkest thou that they tore her from her old father? God! Is God dead?

DANIEL:—(*Gently*)

Peace! mock not God in thy bitterness. Remember his love-kindness to thee through all the days of thy life, and let not the stings of grief and adversity prick thee to those words of bitterness.

AZARIAH:—

Yes, 'tis bitter, 'tis bitter! They seek to damn her soul. Madeline, will God suffer it for thee to lie in painted splendor beside that monster of lust? Who will protect purity, since God is dead?

DANIEL:—

Comfort! how knowest thou that the King has taken our dear Madeline to defile her purity? Thy servants, in their fright at the prince and his soldiers, may have stretched the truth, and naught of harm will come to her.

AZARIAH:—

Thou hast not a father's heart. Must she suffer kisses upon her brow, her lips? Nay, rather a thousand times stabs in her fair bosom, than kisses with its curse upon her brow.

Enter Seba

(*Daniel leaves Azariah, and goes towards the Prince to meet him. Seba looks wildly about.*)

DANIEL:—(*To Seba*)
Let not thy lips speak here what thy face tells too well. The good Azariah can scarcely bear himself up under his heavy load of grief.

SEBA:—(*Dully to Daniel*)
Belshazzar hath taken my Madeline for his queen.

DANIEL:—
How heardest thou that? If it be true what thou hast spoken, the heart of my friend will break with grief.

SEBA:—
I have seen such things as man's tongue ne'er can tell. Would to God that I had not seen what I have seen, nor heard what I have heard. Man's heart cannot for long bear what mine has borne, and not wish to kill, and kill.

AZARIAH:—(*Seeing Seba*)
Noble Prince, look at me. Thy face is dark and well I know that thou hatest God, too. Scarcely can I keep my spirit in this old body. Already, I see the palace of the dead with its ebon gates,—cold black gates. Seba, I feel that soon I must enter there. Ah! they stole her, my soft chick.

DANIEL:—
Come Azariah, come with thy friend, Daniel.

(*Exeunt Daniel and Azariah*)

SEBA:—(*Pacing*)
There is only blackness without, the world is within me. How can all the face of things change so quickly? Yesterday, I loved, and my heart held naught of hate towards any human soul; I was joyous, I was drunk with life. Then that scene within the palace came, and I stood there, restrained by a hope, that by not risking my life, perchance, I could save her honor. I forgot, in the hate of that moment everything; I forgot the cry of prayer, the voiceless supplication; I forgot the greed of the world, its barren gifts, its demands in return; I forgot the kiss, the throbbing heart, the voice's sweetest music; then I only hated, and had to stand there inactive, helpless, unable to raise my hand to protect a life dearer to me than mine. (*Pauses*) Yet, there may be hope. The Persian hosts encamp on the plain, and soon will hurl themselves against these walls. Would that I were ten thousand Sebas, to face Belshazzar. (*Enter Nis-Bel and stands listening*) God grant that great Cyrus of Persia may raze and level the temples and mounds of this wicked city, turning its streets into a bloody shambles.

NIS-BEL:—(*Advancing*)
Bloody shambles? Jew, ere tomorrow eve, the gods being good to thee, thou wilt have thy wish.

SEBA:—(*Turning*)

Thou here? Thou who hast swept off to thyself the wealth of others, lined thy coffers with the substance of a persecuted people, thrust on by thy insatiable greed; thou who hast sent the abominable seed of thy malignant soul into every cranny of Babylon to sprout there, and be the ruin of innocence and purity; thou must die by my hand. Knowest thou who faces thee?

NIS-BEL:—(*Coldly*)

Most certainly, thou art an arrant fool. Thou art unarmed, and here at my side, hangs my sword. If ever thou thoughtest aught of thy country-woman, now the queen, listen to this message which she bade me,—commanded me, I should say,—to bring to thee and her father. Leaving out the pretty phrases and tender words too fragile to bear in transport for so long a journey, her message is this.

"Tell Seba,"—she said Prince Seba, but that I'll skip,—"tell Seba, if he loveth Madeline, who was his betrothed, to care for her father in his helplessness and loneliness." She added with the usual female weakness, "and thou, Seba, oft think of me, as I was then." (*Going*) And Nis-Bel might add for thine own information, that tomorrow will be a very good time to prove to Queen Madeline, that thou art able to shelter her father.

(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

SEBA:—

Thy lips have laid on me a command as sacred

as the voice of God, and that thing will I do as long as I breathe, and can say "Madeline."

(*CURTAIN*)

Act Third

Scene Third

(*Early night of the fourth day. The great banquet hall in the palace,—Present, Belshazzar, Nitrocris, Nis-Bel, Madeline, women, attendants, dancing girls, slaves, etc. The curtain rises upon a scene of revelry.*)

Belshazzar:—
More wine bring! wine of Media! wine from Cappadocia, red wine from Persian fields! (*Holding his goblet aloft*) This red wine that I quaff is Cyrus' blood.

Nis-Bel:—
Or blood from the veins of the Canaanite.

Belshazzar:—
True Prince, but no more of Jew or Persian.

Nis-Bel:—
Yet, thou must not forget either.

Belshazzar:—(*Drunk, pauses with uplifted glass*)
I remember well; I remember those wounded messengers returning; I remember Busalosser's

scarlet helm; I remember the tumult without the walls; yea, I see those peridote eyes of,—of Madeline, the Jewess. Madeline, look on Belshazzar.

MADELINE:—
Great, my lord.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Enraged*)
Thou tremble at thy lord! Am I drunk, am I bloody, am I cruel? Nay, thy looks lie. Belshazzar is gentle, meek as the lamb.

MADELINE:—
Yea, my lord.

BELSHAZZAR:—
No! again thou liest. Belshazzar is cruel, relentless as the tiger, great as the gods.

MADELINE:—
Yea, my lord.

BELSHAZZAR:—
That answer is better. Thou must be my sweet judge, for who liketh to judge himself? What, ho! Music! Queen Madeline, Jew, what music likest thou best?

MADELINE:—
The harp, my lord.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*To a musician*)
Singer, bring thy harp of gold. Sing thou a

tender song. (*To another*) Thou, then, on thy dulcimer play something braver to stir the blood. (*To all*) Bring timbrels, bring sachbut, and with them make music to the stars, and know that Belshazzar is king.

(*The musicians begin the music on their several instruments*)

NIS-BEL:—
O King, the silver lutes!

BELSHAZZAR:—
Not for Belshazzar. Bellow forth timbrels, barsoms, and drums, alarm the very gods of the skies, and proclaim to Babylon Belshazzar, King.

NIS-BEL:—(*Cunningly*)
Not yet. Where are the Jew, and Jehovah?

BELSHAZZAR:—
In hell, not in Babylon.

NIS-BEL:—
Jehovah is yet great.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Thou liest! Jehovah is as impotent as the pigmy sprite, in the nether world. His might hath been taken away, and His omnipotence hath shrunken to a mere, "I wish." Belshazzar hath conquered Jehovah of Canaan; he hath conquered the powers of heaven and earth; he hath conquered death and death shall die.

NIS-BEL:—

Yet He hath might. None there be on earth, or in heaven who dare defy the omnipotence of Israel's God. On mention of His mighty name, the priests of Asshur tremble, and the fires on his altars burn low. So it is said by His people, that their God will punish him who dare defy Jehovah, or harm His people. This belief is spread forth, King, and none yet in Babylon hath dared kill a Jew.

BELSHAZZAR:—

I would defy Him, if I knew He would blast me. He hath no real glory, and cannot protect His people. (*Rising thoroughly aroused*) Thunder from thy high heavens, Jehovah, God, and blast me, or I will kill Thee, and make thy kingdom of the skies and on the earth as desolate as the desert sands of Arabia! Bel-Marduk ruleth in heaven. Bring forth the sacred vessels, the vessels of gold, and of silver, which the great Nebuchadnezzar brought from Jerusalem unto Babylon. Go! (*Servants retire, the King resumes his seat*) The dancers, ho! Let the King drink in the melody of women's moving forms.

(*The King lies back and watches the girls dance*)

NITROCRIS:—

Thou art brave tonight.

BELSHAZZAR:—

The world cannot match me.

NIS-BEL:—(*Aside*)
A royal weakling in the third degree of drink sits playing the fool, and boasts that the world holds not his peer. Faith in mine own judgment makes me think that if there were a copy like yon royal braggart, that heaven in shame would destroy it, and repent having permitted the shadow, without the man.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Angrily to Nis-Bel*)
I heard thee muttering. Speak aloud tonight. 'Tis time for speaking. None of thy sly looks, thy mutterings, or thy sparkling eyes turned inward upon thyself. I heard it, "without the man." Wherefore, Prince?

NIS-BEL:—
I marked thy glory, thy purple magnificence, and thy radiant queen crowned with flowers, and bethought me,—for in moments like these, thoughts of contrast thrust themselves unbidden upon us,—of the plight of our people, if thy father, King Nabonidus, still reigned in Babylon without thee, without the man, the peerless warrior, his might and his glory.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Drunk*)
Great art thou, Prince, and I make thee ruler over Accadia. (*Nis-Bel bows*)

(*Re-enter Attendants with sacred vessels*)

(*Seizes a goblet*) The goblets, pass the sacred goblets round. Wine hath made us gods. Fill

the cups, fill I say, and drink wine from the goblets of Jerusalem's sacred shrine. (*Raising cup above his head*) Drink to the death of Jehovah, and the Jew, out of the cups wrought in Judah. Jehovah, how Belshazzar, King, despiseth thee!

NIS-BEL:—
I drink to death. (*Drinks*) Fill again; yet more. Belshazzar, drink and pledge me from this large one.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Seizing it*)
I quaff from the Cup of God. Cry it on Canaan's sacred hills, shout it through Jerusalem's empty streets, that Jehovah liveth not, and that Babylonian princes drink from His sacred cups.

MADELINE:—(*Aloud*)
Ah, my God! Suffer not this blasphemy.

NIS-BEL:—(*To King*)
Yea, and verily He hath kissed thy feet, and gone forever is His power.

MADELINE:—(*Loudly*)
God of Heaven, manifest thyself and hurl back on this wicked King these blasphemies and curses.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Angrily raising his hand*)
Woman, Viper!

MADELINE:—(*Pointing*)
King, look!

(*Suddenly on the wall, a hand moves in flame and traces words of destiny in unknown characters. All is hushed, they sit and stand with tense muscles, frightened faces, and whisper one to another*)

BELSHAZZAR:—(*With wild horror on his face*)
Dash the cups to pieces! Pierce the hand of flame!

NITROCRIS:—(*Whispering*)
A sign, an awful sign, O King!

NIS-BEL:—(*Coldly*)
Babes in purple!

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Slowly*)
The God of Canaan yet lives. It is a sign from the Great King above. (*Loudly*) Quick, call the seers.

(*Exit Attendant*)

MADELINE:—
Ah, God! I thank thee.

NIS-BEL:—
The seers can only lie. Nis-Bel himself sees the fiery writing, else he would say impossible.

BELSHAZZAR:—
What huge jest hath been played on me? Who dared to defy the King; to tread invisible over these antique floors of jasper, past my winged bulls; who defies the throne of bronze; who walks

down the pillared vistas, between the Babylonian soldiery, to insult Belshazzar? Look! Yet it flames.

Enter Three Seers

Wise men of Media, if ever ye did strain your eyes adown the dim vistas of the future to read the meaning on the face of destiny, and have read it, now strain all your heaven-given powers to read yonder flaming letters.

1ST SEER:—(*Taken back*)
Flaming!

2ND SEER:—
Letters of blood!

3RD SEER:—
In unknown characters, not of Babylonia, not of Media, unknown in Elam, strange to Canaan, scarlet!

1ST SEER:—
How awful! the letters shift to and fro.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Asshur, my lord, but they hesitate! Read, or by the flaming fires of hell, before the faces of men, ye shall perish wretchedly! Still, ye hesitate. Arioch, put them to death; pierce them on the threshold of the temple, and throw their bodies over the walls to the Persian crows. (*They lead the seers away*) Ransack all the temples, bring all the priests, and if there be

wisdom in my city, I will know the meaning of those awful characters.

NIS-BEL:—
Great King, there is one among the Jews, reputed wise. He calleth himself Daniel, and can interpret dreams. Bring him hither to read yonder scrawl.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Arioch! if thou thinkest aught of thy life, haste and bring the Jew hither, else thou wilt follow the seers over Babylon's walls. (*Exit Arioch*)

(*The King trembles; Nitrocris has hidden her head; Madeline's face is lighted with a great joy*)

NIS-BEL:—(*Half aloud*)
They hear naught, nor see, nor care. The flaming light hath taken all senses away. Always do the weak fear what they do not understand. What a scene of fear! something like nothing one ever saw, all stark with terror, mad, and topsy-turvy, like life in a drunken dream. But, no man alive can read yonder crimson sign. How it shifts! Nis-Bel almost trembles. Daniel of the Jews hath no more penetration than Hea's seers, and in the nature of things, will fail to read the message. Then he will follow the seers over the walls. (*Aloud*) King Belshazzar, here cometh the prophet of Judah, who can read the message sent thee from the unknown.

Enter Daniel, Azariah, Mishael, and Seba.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Jew, interpret yonder flaming letters written in blood. If thou canst read yonder sign, thou shalt have thy heart's desire; thou shalt be next Belshazzar in power; thou mayest have a temple to thy God and thy reward will be exceeding great.

DANIEL:—(*Turns from throne towards wall and back again*)

Belshazzar, who is she sitting there beside thee, thou cruel and lustful King?

BELSHAZZAR:—

The queen! Quick, interpret!

DANIEL:—

Belshazzar of Babylon, she is the child of this man, Azariah.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Quick, I say, or thy body will bleed and thou wilt breathe out thy life through a spear hole.

DANIEL:—

Listen, O King! When thy grandsire, Nebuchadnezzar, ruled over this people, even as thou, he would not hear of Jehovah. He lived in splendor, and gloried in cruelty and vengeance; then the great God of Israel did humble him even as the beasts of the fields, and he did eat grass like the ox. He lived as the beasts of the fields for seven long years, until he looked up to heaven, and knew in his heart that

Jehovah was greater than he and his gods. Then, he ruled again over thy fair city. King Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's sins were great, but thine are greater. Thou hast mocked God; thou hast profaned His sacred vessels; and always, even before now, thy every success adorned itself with the red garlands of sin. Thy doom was written upon the wall, when thou didst lift up thy hand to defy and dishonor Him. Look you at the flaming sign and read in it thy doom, O King!

MADELINE:—(*Fervently*)
Thank thee, O Father!

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Faintly*)
The meaning read.

DANIEL:—
Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin!
"God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it."

BELSHAZZAR:—
Yet more!

DANIEL:—
"Thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting."

BELSHAZZAR:—
Great Seer, still more!

DANIEL:—
"Thy kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

(*The writing disappears*)

BELSHAZZAR:—
Clothe the prophet in scarlet and gold. Be thy name Belte-shazzar, and reign thou over the third part of my kingdom, as mighty as I.

DANIEL:—(*Pointing to Madeline*)
Release her to her people.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Nay! she is the queen.

DANIEL:—
Thou truly art blind. Life, O King, is change, death is change. Thou wouldst pluck the rose without the thorn; drink the wine and leave the dregs; thou wouldst live and forget dying; seek pleasure without pain. Life's roses have withered, and now thou wilt have the pain; drink the lees, and bear the hate. Thou shalt go from this banquet hall to the hall of judgment. Belshazzar, King, in the night thou shalt die.

(*Exit with others*)

BELSHAZZAR:—
That awful voice! terrible in its deliberation.

Ho, music! be merry, dance, drink, laugh, for 'twas only the drunken dream of a drunken King.

NIS-BEL:—
Yea, O King, and meaneth naught.

(*The revelry begins anew and continues*)

(*CURTAIN*)

ACT FOURTH

Scene First

(Night of the Fourth Day. Scene interior of Belshazzar's chamber. Present Belshazzar and Nis-Bel)

Nis-Bel:—

Thou, in thy fear, didst give power into the hands of Daniel, unto him, the seer of Israel, unto the priest of God, whose rival power in heaven and earth, thou shouldst fear. He is a Jew, a captive, an old man, fixed and set in his ways of life, and changeless in his ways of thinking; and unto him thou hast committed the sceptre over one-third of thy kingdom. King Belshazzar, thy decree of death for the Jews will be carried out, for I, thy captain, have thy seal, and to cancel thy decree, thou must strike Nis-Bel dead with thy royal hand.

Belshazzar:—

Yet, I hear those words of terror, Prince. They will not leave me. Belte-shazzar, the prophet of God hath stirred up the blackest mud and mire of my nature. In the night again came his voice, "Belshazzar, King, in the night thou shalt die; Belshazzar, King, in the night on thy

battlements, grasping the sword, thou shalt die. Belshazzar, King, Jehovah is not mocked."

NIS-BEL:—

In the past, the God of Canaan troubled not thy fathers who lived in the full measure of their glory,—men.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Yea, I too, slew thousands on the hills of Canaan, 'twas but an incident; thousands of horsemen of Elam bore I down in battle; I hurled wild death on earth far to north and west; and I rode thundering over the earth like a fire-god, desecrating temples, forcing submission of kings and of peoples, and with dire fury razed walls and palaces. Oh, what joy was there in the torture! How relentless was my stroke of death! How the victims trembled when I stood up and gloated that I could destroy! (*Slowly*) But now I fear, and have seen nothing more substantial than a bloody scrawl on my marbles. (*Shrinks in horror*) It moved and flickered, and its scarlet letters blazed and burned, sending forth a message of death. The light from that flaming scrawl flashed angerly, and joined those deep in Belteshazzar's prophetic eye.

NIS-BEL:—(*Turning from window with contempt on face*)

Thou majestic? Art powerful? Nay! Bugs and lice! Majestic thou callest thyself; let it pass since 'tis only a name. Fear and majesty dwelling

as co-equals on the same brow! Impossible! (*Louder*) Impotent King! For shame, if thou can do naught else, don thy war harness, and go forth against the Persian, and fighting, forget the terror of God. (*Turns in contempt back to the window*) Nor mockery, nor jeers, can arouse him who fears thus, and the sprites of the air and the powers of the skies fright us e'en more than a gibbet with its dangling corpses dripping blood.

BELSHAZZAR:—

That sovereign dread! O, Asshur, my lord, bring forth all thy might from the fanes and shrines of Babylon to aid thy servant in fighting that majesty, terrible and invisible, of a strange god. (*Pauses, then more slowly*) But, how could the King know the Jew was a sacred people, far above kings and princes? How knew I that when I seized Madeline, and tasted her body, that I was outraging her God while obtaining a foretaste of her paradise?

NIS-BEL:—(*Contemptuously*)

Many weaklings there be who fright at their own shadows. There, a man become babe again, as weak as gazelle, antelope, or spotted stag. The robe of life oft covers the hero; then again, as needs must be, it also covers the fool.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Bel-Marduk, break this awful silence,this silence that lets a thought be heard. Thunder from thy clouds, enwrap the King in thy flames, and make

him the sport of the winds and the butt of the storms, but break this terrible silence, out of which gleam the awful eyes of the avenging Jehovah, and from which beckons the moving finger of destiny. (*Falls upon his couch with his head between his hands*)

NIS-BEL:—

A weakling, a royal fool, before whom I have oft bowed my head. That comes from brooding, a damnable quality in man. Thus, always to be conscience sick with a heart burning from the prick of elfin swords, comes from a sick imagination, and a magnified idea of the divinity of this aggregate of worthless flesh, called the body. A season in the hills would make him less fearful to look the sun in the face. Of all the qualities which speak, I cherish only self-esteem, for it serves none, and is served by all others. (*Touching the King*) Glorious Prince, who hath made thee believe these things? The meanest tiller of the fields, and the lowliest shepherd on thy hills, would mock thy weakness, thou who art supreme over Babylonia.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Fearfully*)

My fears come from the whisperings of the invisible; they are nameless, yet gross as the mounts of Armenia.

NIS-BEL:—

Call not him free, who rules; he bindeth himself with the fetters of fear which he would im-

pose upon his people. King, art thou a slave? Art thou tributary to thy weakness; slave to thy fears? To die on a spear were better than to whimper like a woman.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Foul fiend of hell! Knowest thou that thou canst not speak thus to me, to Belshazzar, to the King of Babylon? Thou demi-devil, cold as ice, thou who hast never feared, tremble now before him whom thou hast mocked. Tremble, or by the mazy constellations of heaven, thou shalt hang crucified before the temples of those gods whom thou hast mocked!

NIS-BEL:—(*Coldly*)
Thy anger becomes thee better than impotency. By listening to Nis-Bel, a fearless prince of thy royal line, thy ear will hear things fraught with meaning for thee.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Quickly*)
Hath aught else transpired?

NIS-BEL:—
Yea, long ago. I can tell thee things which unknown to thee, have happened in the secret recesses of thy palace, and I can recite to thee other things, which have come to pass in places far remote, yet which touch thee closer than thy robes of purple.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Hath heaven spoken again?

NIS-BEL:—

Doth a man of sense look for angels; doth he expect signs and portents and see realities in shadows? My knowledge is all of earth; my mind hath never soared to heaven. Nis-Bel finds earth far more wonderful than his comprehension without challenging the skies for riddles. King, man's passions are stranger than the wee stars of the skies; thy weakness. Belshazzar, hath more meaning for thy subjects than that meteor which yesternight did bewilder their senses.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Thou talkest of heaven, of stars, and of fears. What hath happened, Prince, that thou fearest to speak it forth?

NIS-BEL:—

My only fear,—and 'tis great, 'tis true,—is that this intelligence, so closely touching thee, will again set thee rocking, and nursing thy royal head between thy palms. But since thy desire to know hath become so manifest, I will speak. King, ere thou didst take Madeline, the Jewess, to wife, she had lain many times with Nis-Bel, Prince of Babylon. Nay, do not start so, and grind thy teeth. Such anger will not change those events. Thou hast been frightened by a writing on thy marbles, which Belte-shazzar, the Jew, didst say was a warning to thee for thy blasphemy of Jehovah, his God, and for thy dishonor to Madeline, the Jewess. Thinkest thou that the great Jehovah of the Jews would trouble Himself

to avenge such a trull as she? Thinkest thou that He would descend from His high heavens to write thy doom on thy marbles, because thou hadst lain with a Jewess leman picked up from the streets? She was ne'er a maid since she can remember, but the very trash of Jewry selling her passion for a song, or a draught of red wine, and shaming even the painted harlots of Babylon's streets. She feigned innocence; the mask of purity fitted her well, but the forces of heaven have other opportunities to vent themselves, rather than rob a king of his glory, because he outraged a drab, known to the streets of Babylon. Thou, thus wouldst make thy power a mockery, when there is naught to fear.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Nis-Bel, thou shalt be made the mightiest of my captains. Thy right hand shall hold the sceptre, not alone over Accadia, but over the half of Babylonia. The prophet, Daniel's power, which I gave him this night, shall be shorn from him. Thou art right, and all my trouble came from following after new gods.

NIS-BEL:—

Yet more, listen! I would tell thee more of the Jews, those people who do pretend to live in peace and love, and of those whom until now, thy might hath protected. The Prince Seba,—called a prince among the Jews,—is deadlier to thy power, than the lion to the fawn. He is secretly leagued with the Persian, knoweth his purpose,

and keepeth Cyrus informed of the movements of thy cohorts and the plans of thy captains. He hath set spies about the palace to catch the secret ear and purpose of the King. He watcheth thy captains, knoweth their strength and mind, and Cyrus knoweth them too, better than thou, O King. I have seen Seba in close and uneasy talk with the captain of thy guard. They speak together for no good, as I take it, O King.

BELSHAZZAR:—

The captain shall die. By the sacred seven, thou hast re-kindled the fires of life in my heart! I shall again rule,—and since it must be,—I shall rule for a season in blood to purify the festering wounds in my empire.

NIS-BEL:—

Now thou speakest like a king. The ebon gates of death yawn black before every man who walketh this earth, and it is only, O King, by deeds of glory that thou canst perpetuate thy memory and live in ages yet to be born. Man honors not the petrified ooze-slime from the lips of kings. In the passing of a monarch, his people find cause for moan, remembering naught of evil against him, but place the body in the tomb, wrapped in its purple robe which stayeth royal no longer than the clay stayeth man. To live forever through the cycles of change, thou must live in deeds. Rise up then, King Belshazzar, and smite thy foes. Punish the Jews, grind them to powder under thy relentless chariot wheels, and in thy

renewed might, drive the Persian flying before thee over the plains of Mesopotamia.

BELSHAZZAR:—

That Belshazzar will do. Wine made me weak, but thou, by thy good counsel and courage hast made me strong. Henceforth, the King's hand will never tremble, but be as relentless as fate is. Prince, I lay first upon thee a command, and let execution follow hard upon it. Ere thou rest, drink, sleep, or do aught else, see that Seba, the Jew, and Arioch, my captain, lie side by side, —dead. (*Going*) See to it, Prince. (*Exit King*)

NIS-BEL:—

He hesitates too much, and is weak, and changeth as oft as the colors of the chameleon's skin to suit the complexions and opinions of the medium wherein he liveth. (*Pausing*) But it was strange, that flaming hand. Fear hath entered Babylon. The King trembles; dead is the brave man, the strong soldier; valor is gone, might hath vanished. Only the walls remain, and Jehovah ruleth Belshazzar through fear. Belshazzar saith to Nis-Bel to-night, "Prince, slay not the Jew as I commanded thee to do this morn," and hard on the heels of this command follows a counter-command, "Prince, slay Seba and Arioch." He might have added, and still been within the pale of truth, "I fear." True, then he was in his cups, but having rekindled the spark of a dying hope by the tinder of lies, Nis-Bel will yet gain by indirection what otherwise had failed. (*Striding*

away) But such poor material to work on! He keeps the moulded form no better than an over-wet clay.

(*CURTAIN*)

Act Fourth

Scene Second

(*Time, night of fourth day. Interior of a room in the palace. Present, Madeline and Nitrocris*)

Nitrocris:—

The King of Babylon wanders about his gardens distracted, cursing the stars, the marble halls, his gods, and himself and trembles. Thou, foul whore of Canaan, hath stolen away his manhood and majesty in thy embrace of passion. His dream of glory, which I have for so long fostered and fed, vanished from him in thy first kiss.

Madeline:—

Wilt thou not pity me? Canst thou not see that I suffer, and am blameless?

Nitrocris:—

'Tis past pitying time, if ever pity were known on these plains and under these skies. Relentless have my fathers been, and relentless I will be in my condemnation of thee who by thy pert looks, and woman wiles, hath pulled down the dream palace reared in such glory and magnificence.

MADELINE:—

Wast thou ever a babe, an innocent babe, cooing up at a mother as spotless as thou? Wast thou ever innocent, and in blushing and tender girlhood wished and feared a lover's spoken love? For the sake of that innocence which was once thine, spare me those curses. I never wished it thus; I never thought to foil thy fair plans, nor lessen ambition's dream, nor to steal aught of glory from thy royal son. I know no greater glory than to be called the mother of a noble son, living innocently and free with my chosen lord, and blameless before my God. Thy eyes flash fire, but thou well knowest that I was led a slave before Belshazzar, and chosen as his wife by him and thee. Thy purple covers well thy virtues, if thou hast any, but thy vices shine through thy robes coldly, cruelly.

NITROCRIS:—

Yea, thou wast led; so are multitudes. Thou wast denied choice; few can choose. If ever thou art mother, may Serah destroy thy first-born, destroy him ere he coos to thy delight. In all other things, may Nabu, the holy minister of the gods, blast thy wishes. I hate thy tribe, thy people, those Jews called holy; may thy name, thy race, and thy off-spring, before the eyes of men perish wretchedly, thou who hast stolen the valor, ambition, and glory from Belshazzar's glittering breast.

MADELINE:—

O Babylon, thy cruel queen shames even thee!

Enter Arioch

NITROCRIS:—
Minion, why seekest thou my presence unannounced?

ARIOCH:—
Queen Nitrocris, thy son, the great King, hath arisen from his couch whereon he was stricken, and goeth forth into the city with a strange and awful light in his eyes, unto the temples of his gods. He musters the strong men, and stirreth them to arms, sending messengers in hot haste, hither and thither, and all else is drowned in the din of warlike preparation, and naught else matches the glory of thy son. His face shines, and he sent me hither to tell thee that by the grace of the gods his sickness hath left him.

NITROCRIS:—
Glory to Bel-Marduk! I must haste away. (*Turning again to Madeline*) Thou art cursed whether it be the curse of thy father given thee in thy baby-hood, or the curse of thy mother, or the bewitching curse of some unknown man, add those of Queen Nitrocris to them, and O ye gods of heaven, increase my curses an hundred fold! (*Going*) Thou hast balked my wishes. (*Exit Nitrocris*)

(*Arioch remains silently standing*)

MADELINE:—
Captain, wouldst thou speak aught to me?

ARIOCH:—(*Looking uneasily around*)

Queen Madeline, if I mistake not, thou wast once betrothed to Prince Seba, and doth love him. Seba is my friend.

MADELINE:—

Then thou art my friend, too? Say it, let me hear of a friend in this, my extremity, and the last blessing from my dying lips will be his. I am no queen; only a weak woman who is in need of a friend. Thou art strong, and for the sake of thy friend, Seba, protect me.

ARIOCH:—

Yea, I am strong, but the hate of the King hangs heavy over me ready to drop like a stone upon me. My doom is already written because I had a friend of Jewry called Seba, and because Nis-Bel hath seen us together. (*Touching her lightly*) Would to thy great God, fair lady, that I could aid thee and him. If I could by dying, death would be easy; if I could by living, the King himself could not kill me. (*Sadly*) Prince Seba was my only friend in Babylon, and before I knew that noble Prince, Babylon was a desert waste to me. No one spoke to the Arabian except to command; no one received word from him except to obey. At night I talked to the trees, the stars, the empty silence. In the day, I did naught else but obey Belshazzar. (*Aside*) Must I tell her this? Can her weakness bear a greater burden?

MADELINE:—
My friend, thou wouldst speak to me of something, yet something else?

ARIOCH:—
Yea, fair lady, I must, since each misfortune draws fresh misfortunes unto itself. The King hath now seized thy father, the good Azariah, and Nis-Bel seeks to lay hands on Seba, my friend.

MADELINE:—(*Placing hand on bosom*)
Throbbing! cease, O heart, for in thy mist-girt regions there are things which we who have them know little of, nor do we e'er suspect what heavy woe each heart finally must bear. Will heaven split my heart in twain? Why does the great God punish me thus, me whose only sin hath been a too great love for my father and the Prince? (*Sobs*) Can not Seba flee to some place of safety?

ARIOCH:—
Nay, whither? Fair lady, forgive thy friend the hurt which he fain would have spared thee. He must go hence, and soon will the King's anger also smite him. If it is in his power, ere the stroke of death fall, to aid him or thee, he will do it, and bless God for a friend for whom he can die. Farewell, lady!

(*Exit Arioch*)

MADELINE:—(*Slowly*)
Glory's halo,—love's sheen,—a too rosy dream

of happiness, all, all vanished whither? We come unwillingly from darkness athwart this little beam of light called Life, and soon go out into darkness again. Between the narrow limits of that beam, God hath set a heaven and hell,—a heaven of love, and a hell of suffering. Must I die, too? O God of Israel, speed me on my journey! Do not let my days be centuries of torture, lengthened into threefold centuries of agony. I have embraced a devil, the very fiend of hell, clad in a robe of purple,—'twas no man of earth. His heart is a royal dung-hill, breeding maggots of lust. His splendid torque of gold hath become to me an iron ring, and my crown a cruel mockery. Ah God, how couldst thou suffer this outrage of purity, the mockery of thyself, and not strike instantly with death?

(*CURTAIN*)

Act Fourth

Scene Third

(*Time, a little later same night. Scene is before the temple of Bel-Marduk. Enter Belshazzar from the shrine with bloody hands followed by priests*)

Belshazzar:—

The times cried aloud for a human sacrifice, the death of a man. 'Tis done. (*Holds out hands*) Look, red! (*To priests*) Hath the god yet spoken aught?

1ST PRIEST:—
Nay, not yet.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Go thou back to his altar, and when thou canst, bring me the words and the will of the gods.

(*Exit priest*)

(*Looks at hand*) Oh, the blood!

2ND PRIEST:—
Those blood-stains are crimson like any other.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Still looking at hands*)
Not as crimson as any other, priest. An old man's blood is not so red as youth's. I slew him. It would have befitted thy office better, priest. He was so weak, and lay so still; the knife hardly did prick the skin ere he died. Now he lies there in pallid sleep, while the weird pale flame of Bel-Marduk lights the face of Azariah, prophet of God. He was Madeline's sire, priest. Will Bel-Marduk speak, thinkest thou, since my hand slew the Jew, and not thine?

2ND PRIEST:—
That I know not. Who would presume to foretell heaven's pleasure? The powers above, for three days, have been silent, but the heavens flamed with stars.

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Awfully*)
Not all the powers have been silent. One

spoke. (*Re-enter 1st Priest*) What sayeth the oracle? What sayeth Bel-Marduk?

1st Priest:—

He hath spoken slowly and uncertainly, and the drift of his words which I pieced together over the body of the prophet, meaneth this, "Sacrifice not in the temples of Babylon for the safety of thy city, but in thine own palace give the gods the victim which they demand, offering up the woman whom thou lovest best, and who wearing the royal purple, sat at thy side. By this royal death of the dearest of thy house-hold, thou wilt propitiate the gods, and thy city will be spared thee. Do thou this, nor hesitate."

Belshazzar:—

Awful! one crime demandeth another. First the life of a man, O heaven, thou didst require, now thou must have the dearest of my palace. Mother, or Madeline? The one whom the King loveth best! Said that awful voice aught else?

1st Priest:—

Yea! "The victim must be slain by thy hand, O King of Babylon, and her death must be in thy chamber."

Belshazzar:—(*To priests*)

Out of my sight! Begone! Back, inside, and quickly bury the old man! How quiet he lies! See that he troubles not my sleep. (*Exeunt priests*) Is it Madeline that awful voice meant or mother? (*Staggers off Stage*)

Re-enter Priests

1ST PRIEST:—
The royal fool! The oracle spake naught.

2ND PRIEST:—
Lied thou to the King?

1ST PRIEST:—
For an excellent reason; for gold from the hand of Nis-Bel.

2ND PRIEST:—
Nis-Bel? Is he the Prince of the dark face, and follows there a lion at his heels?

1ST PRIEST:—
Yea, the same. Of his secret purpose, I know naught; but gold and precious stones, and fair promises, he gave me to make Bel-Marduk speak his will as he wished it. That I did. I am corruptible, and a priest, but who is not; only him who never hath been baited enough.

2ND PRIEST:—
What liars all men are! 'Tis proven thus. No one is incorruptible except him who hath never been tried. But why spoke not Bel-Marduk over his fires, on yonder altar, without thy aid, when the King slew the human sacrifice?

1ST PRIEST:—
The sacrifice was a Jew, a prophet of Jehovah,

one Azariah, and Bel-Marduk wishes no offering so old, and no man from Canaan.

(*Enter Seba and Arioch*)

ARIOCH:—(*To priests*)
Back to your temple of blood! (*Drives them at the point of his sword*) Look not on this fair night with those eyes of blood. (*Exeunt priests*) The King's soldiers seek thee, Prince, to do thee harm.

SEBA:—
This short time hath wrought many changes. Can naught avail to snatch my Madeline back from the tomb of the palace?

ARIOCH:—
Comfort, my friend! There may yet be help for thee in thy prayers, but picture not to thyself a too bright future, since that hope may be a false hope,—yes, is a false hope.

Re-enter 1st Priest

(*Angrily*) What! thou here again?

1ST PRIEST:—
I am come on a sacred mission. (*To Seba*) One of thy country-men lies bleeding on the altar of Bel-Marduk. His body is yet warm but he breatheth not.

SEBA:—(*Staggers*)
Great God!

ARIOCH:—*(Catches him)*
Let us go hence. Drink no more from thy chalice of sorrow.

(Re-enter 2nd Priest dragging body of Azariah)
Fiend of Hell!

2ND PRIEST:—*(Throws down body)*
Food for kites, not gods,—a Jew.

SEBA:—*(Recognizing him)*
Azariah, the prophet, and dead! Great God, how life blinds us! Death softens the light and we see. Ah, Madeline, 'tis well that thou knowest naught of this, to add its weight of sorrow to thy already bursting breast. God, ah God!

(Falls, and Arioch catches him)

(CURTAIN)

ACT FIFTH

Scene First

(*Later on same night of Fourth Day. Scene shows interior of King's chamber. Present King and Madeline. Madeline is fast bound on a throne, and surrounded by flowers. Near her are censers with their red fires, and from them rise incense. Madeline's head has fallen forward upon her breast.*)

Belshazzar:—(*Gazing at her*)

Now Bel-Marduk, lord of battles, thy victim sits bound before thee. Terrible art thou to require a sacrifice so fair. (*Picks up a silver dagger*) This hand trembles. (*Looks at dagger*) Now it trembles more. Thou precious instrument of death, ne'er before hast thou tasted blood such as this, thy victim's. Thy wrought handle anon will be warm with the suffused life of her marble body. If thou canst, in thy coldness, feel, or think, or taste, thy cold blade will leap into the heat of life, and in thy lust, thou wilt bite deeper. (*Moving restlessly*) But why stand I here gazing on her, when the oracle bids her ebbing life save Babylon? Pity,—yes it would be pity indeed to sacrifice this fair girl to any god, had she not lain with Nis-Bel. If virgin purity were still fresh up-

on her, the gods would have to find another sacrifice, or Babylon and her King perish at the hands of Cyrus. Ah, the mounds of her rising breasts, hills of delight! But, to stand here availeth naught. I must to my work, the hardest king e'er hath done. (*Louder*) Jewess, thou lovest music. In the banquet-hall, thou didst say that music of the harp, and the tender strains of the lute please thee best. Such music is good to die by. (*Claps hands*) Strike up the music!

(*Low strains float into the room, the censer-fires leap up afresh, and clouds of incense enwrap her body*)

MADELINE:—(*Faintly*)

King, pity! pity on the poor Jewish girl whose only sin was beauty. They lie,—all,—the oracle, —the Prince,—thou,—even the priests of Bel-Marduk have lied. Think well on this inhumanity, and pity me. If thou wilt not spare me, let me die a sacrifice to save my people. Think of my father's grief, the grief of an old man; how he will shake, and tremble, and moan. Grant me only one more day of life, that I may again see my father, that I may kiss him, and press him to my heart, and say farewell.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Farewells have been said. Thy father died this night on the altar of Bel-Marduk. They have thrown him over the wall; they have torn off his fingers, a wild beast's banquet. (*Stretching out*

his hand) This hand clutcheth the dagger, this hand struck the blow; see, yet it is bloody, crimson with his cold blood. (*Pointing*) The fires of hell blaze this night over Babylon, the very stars flame and wander about the skies, the moon is pale as death, and scarcely can be seen, and only thy death can propitiate the gods. The oracle hath spoken thus.

MADELINE:—

Belshazzar, I am so young to die. The wild blood pulses and sings through me. I am in thy power, so spare me for thyself, for my body that I might live. Choose thou, for sacrifice some other, someone who wishes to die, someone oppressed by the weariness of a soul.

BELSHAZZAR:—

Thy pleadings weaken my purpose, yet they avail thee naught. Thou couldst never love me. Wherefore wast thou cold towards thy lord on thy nuptial night?

MADELINE:—

I could not be otherwise. Love hath no other reason than itself. I loved a Prince of Judah, and that was a fatal love; but hear me, Belshazzar, true love is very cheap to be bargained with death. (*Raising herself up as far as possible*) Strike, O King, since thou must, and strike quickly and I will bless that hand of murder which sends me quickly from this throne of pain to the arms of my father. Quick, pause not to let me see the gleaming steel. Strike!

BELSHAZZAR:—

Willing art thou to prate in thine own favor, even in the presence of death. Listen to the strains of the lute. (*Laying bare her breast*) White! O dagger, a fitting morsel for thee. Bite thou deep and slowly, that she may feel herself die, and sinking into the charnels of death, look back from the gates of Hell upon the new splendor of Belshazzar, King, and a Babylon delivered. (*Presses the dagger slowly into her breast*) Hence, thou beggar, thou beggar of life.

MADELINE:—(*Dying*)

Anon,—more tears will be poured into the chalice,—the chalice of time, and oft kings,—kings, Belshazzar, have wept. Jehovah, pity,—pity,—(*Dies*)

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Standing back to look at body*)

Good! Warmer in death than life towards the King of Babylon.

(*Draws his mantle over the Jewess, and goes to the window. A meteor flashes in the sky. Din and shouting are heard without the wall.*)

The priests of Marduk lied. Dead she lies, yet the heavens foretell havoc and destruction. (*Walks back and looks at body*) Where is gone the glow of that warm body,—whither fled? She lies there so cold and white, too white. (*Suddenly*) The King of Babylon hath been made the butt of an awful jest. (*Rushing out*) I swear by heaven and earth to drive my sword through Nis-Bel, the arch-fiend of blackest hell.

(*CURTAIN*)

Act Fifth

Scene Second

(*Time, same night. Scene is on the battlements surrounding Babylon. Alarums, clash of arms, fires flash. The curtain rises on three soldiers dragging in Seba, and followed by Nis-Bel*)

Nis-Bel:—(*To soldiers*)
Stay! Here! that column, bind him fast to it. (*Soldiers lash him to it*) (*To Seba*) Thus, thou must be self-punished by the real arrows of thy Persian friends. Nis-Bel only falleth into the world's way of justice. These hissing arrows will soon end thee. Then a dainty feast for worms if worms eat Jews,—a doubt.

Seba:—(*Struggling*)
Great God, remember thy servant!

Nis-Bel:—(*Mocking*)
Useless struggles, Prince. Thy God is impotent to save, powerless to damn. Thou really believest in thy religion, where the dead rise? Gettest thou not enough life in this existence? Then, 'twere well to die.

Seba:—
Inhuman dog! the sons of Israel are not all dead yet, and still there is justice somewhere in the world.

Nis-Bel:—(*Striding before Seba*)
Jew, if in thy position, thou canst move thy

head, look about thee, and thou mayest be inspired by this glorious scene of conflict. I wish thee joy in it. 'Tis natural, this strife. Ho! the very elements teach us war, and make us maniacs or gods. Justice, saidst thou? Azariah, thy prophet is dead. Hearest that? Thy prophet, who held lore like an old wine skin, and was so hardened that one thought him full, that very Jew died on a pagan altar. Hearest that? Then where is aught of justice under the sun? (*An arrow whizzes by*) They will be thy little friends, those little winged bees. Mind lest they sting thee. (*Going*) Thou hast been a good Jew, and if 'twere my wont, I'd go below to mourn for thee. Thou wouldst have been better,—far better,—if thou couldst have named thy sire.

(*Exit Nis-Bel*)

SEBA:—

That hell-hound, Nis-Bel, to leave me thus! I saw his wolf's teeth gleaming.

Enter Belshazzar

SHOUTS BELOW:—

War! war! war! death! havoc! death!

BELSHAZZAR:—

Woe like unto this ne'er before hath been, nor such a night within the memory of mortal man. Destruction rides through the air on wings of terror, and the fell night terrifies with promises of doom. These winged arrows sing, havoc. Those

shouts below cry, death. (*Seeing Seba*) About thee, is flying death. Thy Persian friends are likely to prove thy executioners. Mayest thou die slowly, Jew. Who left thee thus, thus as I would have placed thee?

SEBA:—
Nis-Bel bound me. King, he nourished to life this fell night, when heaven and earth are at strife; this havoc; this fear; he made possible this world of madmen; these forces of destruction; these brainless and insensate demons whistling out to thee and me, Death.

BELSHAZZAR:—
I seek him with the sword. Whither fled he?

SEBA:—
To safety. God of heaven, blast this earth with fire, send the King of Babylon quick to hell, let not another king breathe on this fair earth, to despoil innocence! Suffer him not to live! O God, break these chains, that I may, with these bare hands kill Belshazzar!

Enter Messenger

MESSENGER:—(*To King*)
The walls are pierced. Death, in his spectral robes hovers over the city.

BELSHAZZAR:—
The palace guards, despatch! Away!

(*Exit Messenger*)

(*To Seba*) If the darts of Cyrus kill thee not, the sword of the King will.

Enter 2nd Messenger

2ND MESSENGER:—(*To King*)
Death, in his spectral robes, stops at the gates of the palace.

BELSHAZZAR:
Lead against them the Ethiops. Away!

(*Exit Messenger*)

Enter Busalosser wounded

BUSALOSSER:—(*Falling against a column breathless*)
They storm thy hundred brazen gates, they press through the breach, and strike well in the dark. I die, O King, in thy service.

BELSHAZZAR:—
Nay not in my service. Thy place is within the breach. Die by Belshazzar's sword. (*Kills him*)
Cyrus will find Babylon a shambles.

SEBA:—(*Faintly*)
That! Humanity is no longer human.

Enter Arioch and faces King

BELSHAZZAR:—
Where are thy soldiers, captain?

ARIOCH:—(*Cutting Seba loose*)
Dead!

(*Seba springs down, quickly seizes dead Busalosser's sword and faces King. Fresh showers of arrows, renewed din*)

SEBA:—
Hell hound of Babylon!

(*They fight*)

BELSHAZZAR:—
O fling on earth, ye demons dark your madness, hate, and fell despair! Accurst, accurst, thy doom!

SEBA:—(*Striking*)
Thy curses, fiend, I hurl again!

BELSHAZZAR:—(*Wounded*)
Have I at last met the god of fate on my battlements?

SEBA:—(*Slaying him*)
Avaunt, foul fiend! hence, get thee to the pit of hell! (*King dies*)

Re-enter Nis-Bel

NIS-BEL:—(*Coldly, pointing to King*)
Thy work? His dagger killed thy Madeline, thou him, and now thou must die. (*They fight and Seba is slain*)

SEBA:—(*Dying*)
Ah, Madeline! (*Dies*)

(*Nis-Bel faces Arioch who, being unarmed hurls himself over the battlements*)

ARIOCH:—(*Jumping*)
I will never die by that hand.

NIS-BEL:—(*Looking over*)
Good! dashed to pieces. I have helped many men to death but none before so willingly. (*Stands back and gloats over the dead*) Death here, death there, yonder, above, below, everywhere, and among the dying stands Nis-Bel, the Prince. Who hath done this? Look on me, and be answered. (*Kicks Seba's body*) Thou art the cause. A man's love, refused by a woman, hath thus stained thy walls, Babylon. Day of Wrath, how I welcome thee! Thou comest to crown the success of my vengeance, my vengeance that worketh like fate. Wrath of Asshur? Nay! Of Jehovah? Nay! Of Nis-Bel? Yea, his wrath hath done this. No power of heaven began this work, nor of hell. 'Twas begun on earth, conceived of in the inner strife of this breast, atoned for by the blood of these lifeless clods. This breast was made thrall to hate, and its ravenous fires burned brightly, destroying love, pity, everything except a great desire for vengeance. Now I have it. (*Looks over the battlements*) They pour in, wave upon wave, cohort after cohort. Asshur! how their chariots jam. Yonder fools fighting in the breach know not that here lies that purple fool

who ruled over them. (*Stands back and kicks Belshazzar's body*) The folly of great pride! Fool, not to use cunning as well as power, so there he lies,—clay. On thy lips, in that banquet-hall, were these words, "death shall die." True, yet,— (*Persian arrow strikes him and he falls*) (*Dying*) Wine! I faint. I die. I fell from heaven, a heaven of vengeance, a feast of blood, at the silver fountains of the gods. Yonder cometh,—cometh,—the Persian,—and,—and the darkness. (*Dies*)

(*The Persians swarm upon the walls*)

(*CURTAIN*)